

Australian Capital Territory (surface water) (SS1)

INITIAL SDL ASSESSMENT RESULT

The Authority is **confident** that the SDL continues to reflect an environmentally sustainable level of take and **proposes the SDL is maintained**.

It is recognised that the extent, nature of and planning for continued monitoring, evaluation and assessment is tailored by the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) government for the management of local and site-specific areas of concern to maintain environmental outcomes.

It is important that the impacts of a changing climate continue to be actively considered for this Unit.

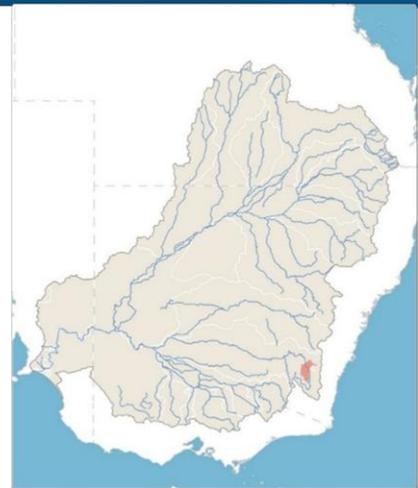


Figure 1: Australian Capital Territory (surface water) (SS1) SDL Resource Unit

The Authority has assessed whether the Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) for the Australian Capital Territory (the **Unit**) continues to support environmental outcomes and reflect an environmentally sustainable level of take (ESLT).

This Assessment Summary provides an overview of the factors which are relevant to that work and the Authority's initial view. This Unit has minimal diversions, and the flow regime is relatively intact. Therefore, the lite assessment approach has been applied. The approach uses a subset of the multiple lines of evidence information base to inform the initial assessment. Current monitoring condition, drivers and climate change risks have been considered.

Information on the methodology used in this assessment is available in the *Summary of Assessment Approach* and the *SDL Assessment and Response Framework*. Information on the *Basin Plan Review Discussion Paper* and process for making a submission are available on the MDBA website.

About this Unit (as at June 2024)

Ramsar sites	Ginini Flats Wetland Complex
Contribution to Basin Water	Not calculated
Key waterways	Murrumbidgee River (1485km), Queanbeyan, Molonglo, Cotter Rivers
Water storages	Googong Reservoir (121 GL), Corin Dam (70.89 GL), Cotter Dam (79.37 GL), Lake Burley Griffin (33.72 GL), Bendora Reservoir (11.54 GL)
Significant groundwater connections	Australian Capital Territory (Groundwater) (GS52)

The [Water Resource Plan \(WRP\)](#) that supports this Unit commenced on 30 June 2020. The WRP includes the rules and arrangements that ACT are using to manage this Unit and maintain sustainability. Further information on water recovery for this Unit is available at the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's [surface water recovery factsheet](#).

Current Condition

Figure 2 below summarises the observed environmental condition in the Unit (as at June 2024).

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As can be seen, the Authority assessed that all themes except Waterbirds, were in *moderate* condition and confidence in the evidence base was medium. Waterbirds were not assessed. The assessment notes that condition grades are aggregated across the Unit and individual streams may be in better (Cotter River) or worse condition (Murrumbidgee River) than the aggregated grade.

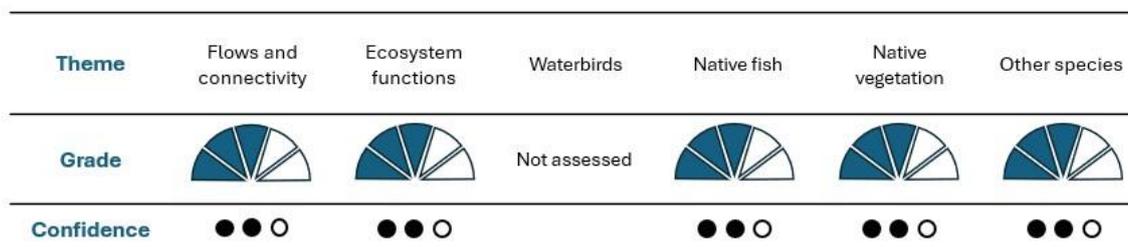


Figure 2. Environmental condition assessment in the Unit. Across each theme environmental condition is graded as *Very Poor*, *Poor*, *Moderate*, *Good* or *Very Good* or *Not Assessed* (as indicated by segments) and confidence in this grading is assessed as *Low*, *Medium* or *High* or *Data Deficient* (as indicated by dots). The Not Assessed grading applies where there are no ecological objectives and no relevant data. The Data Deficient grading relies heavily on expert elicitation to address data paucity. Other species refers to animals including frogs, platypuses and turtles.

Environmental outcomes under a fully implemented Basin Plan

4.9 GL/y of shared Bridging the Gap recovery was required in this Unit. There is also 1.5 GL/y of additional water recovery towards the 450 GL/y target. The Basin Plan is considered fully implemented in this Unit. Due to limited model availability, the end of system flows from the current conditions, fully implemented Basin Plan and without development scenarios were compared for this Unit. The assessment found that the flow regime remains relatively intact and will support the needs of those water-dependent ecosystems.

Environmental outcomes under a climate impacted future

For a description of anticipated climate impacts across the Basin see the *Surface Water Assessment Approach* published on the MDBA website.

Initial Assessment

As noted, the current assessment reflects that flow regime requirements for the assessed themes are currently supported by the SDLs.

The Authority is **confident** that the SDL reflects an environmentally sustainable level of take and is supporting the Basin Plan’s environmental outcomes under full implementation conditions. The Authority also notes the [Commonwealth’s commitment](#) of up to \$55.6 million on a range of measures to improve the health of the upper Murrumbidgee, implemented separately to this review.

It is also the case that the Basin Plan settings in connection with monitoring, evaluation and assessment activities warrant review as they apply to this Unit. Other relevant factors include planning by the ACT government for the management of local and site-specific areas of concern to maintain environmental outcomes.

Consideration of Response

It is recognised that ongoing monitoring, evaluation and assessment will be important, as will planning for and supporting delivery of environmental watering events to maintain environmental outcomes.

Whilst this assessment has not identified any at-risk themes, the Discussion Paper engages with well-known challenges at a sub-Basin and Basin scale including river connectivity and the connection between rivers and their floodplains, water delivery challenges and physical constraints, native fish decline and the impacts of introduced species. The risks of a changing climate continues to be actively considered in the Basin.

Evidence

In addition to the standard evidence sources presented in the *Summary of Assessment Approach* the following specific evidence sources were used for this Unit:

- [ACT Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy - Open Government Information](#)
- Murray–Darling Basin Authority (2023). *Australian Capital Territory – Annual Schedule 12 Report 2022–23, Matter 10.4 Case Study: Upper Murrumbidgee River in Drought*
- ¹Murray–Darling Basin Authority (2021). *Basin Plan Annual Report 2020–21, Case Study: Maximising benefits in the Upper Murrumbidgee River.*
- ¹[Matter 8: ACT 2024 Matter 8 Report](#)
- <https://www.mdba.gov.au/publications-and-data/publications/2025-sustainable-yields>