

Ovens (SS4)

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 Victorian 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.

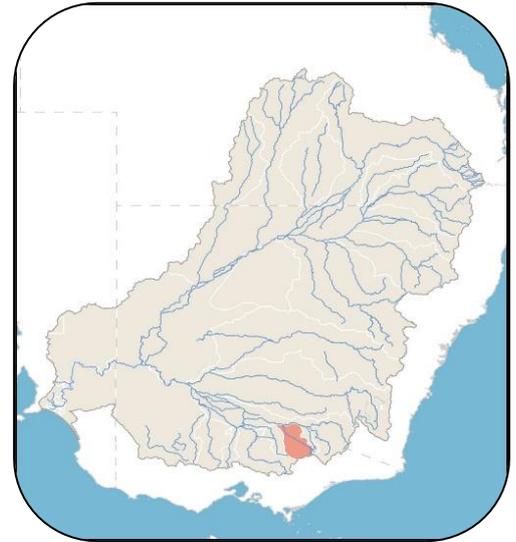


Figure 1: Ovens (SS4) SDL Resource Unit

The Authority has assessed whether the Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) for the Ovens SDL Resource Unit (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 Lines of Enquiry and methodology used in this assessment 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	None
Contribution to Basin Water	6% of the Murray-Darling Basin (approx.)
Key waterways	Ovens River (191km); Tributaries: Morses and Reedy creeks, Buckland, Buffalo and King rivers
Water storages	Lake Buffalo (24 GL), Lake William Hovell (14 GL)
Significant groundwater connections	Goulburn-Murray: Highlands (GS8b) & Goulburn-Murray: Sedimentary Plain (GS8c)

The [Water Resource Plan \(WRP\)](#) that supports this Unit commenced on 13 June 2020. The WRP includes the rules and arrangements that Victoria are using to manage this Unit and maintain sustainability. Further information on water recovery for this SDL Resource Unit is available at the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's [surface water recovery factsheet](#).

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Current Condition

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

As can be seen the Authority assessed that all themes except Other species, Waterbirds and Native fish, were in good condition and that confidence in the evidence base was medium to high. The theme Native fish was assessed as in moderate condition with medium confidence. No rating could be determined for Other species and Waterbirds, because of a lack of data.

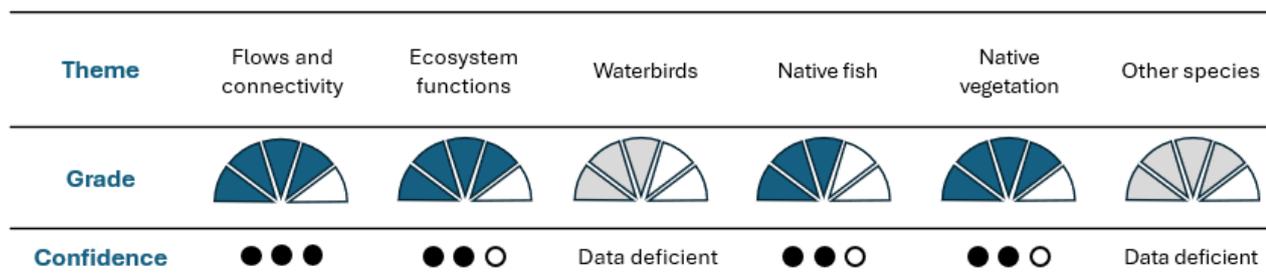


Figure 2. Environmental condition assessment in the Unit. Across each theme environmental condition is graded as *Very Poor*, *Poor*, *Moderate*, *Good*, *Very Good* or *Not Assessed* (as indicated by segments) and confidence in this grading is assessed as Low, Medium, High or Data Deficient (as indicated 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

Water recovery is effectively complete in this Unit but may be subject to change following the SDL Adjustment Mechanism reconciliation in 2026. The flow regime remains relatively intact and expected to sustain 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 six 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 with none of the themes having been identified as at risk.

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 Victorian 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 continue 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:

- [Ovens system](#)
- [Victoria's Basin Plan report card 2020](#)