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Report maps 'stress' in Australian catchments and aquifers

The National Water Commission (NWC) has released a new report, [Assessing water stress in Australian catchments and aquifers](#), which identifies surface and groundwater systems that are stressed due to water extraction, regulation or altered flows.



Credit: Margaret Stoekel/scienceimage

The Commission has commented in the past that progress to address the overuse of water resources is disappointingly slow. A major obstacle to action has been reluctance by governments to publicly acknowledge overused and overallocated water systems.

This has been compounded by an inability by governments to agree on national definitions for overuse and overallocation.

The latest NWC report sets out a nationally consistent method for measuring and reporting water stress in Australian catchments. It shows that, despite the public focus on the Murray-Darling Basin, the causes of water stress are not confined to the impacts of irrigated agriculture.

Some rivers and aquifers in and near capital cities and other urban areas are also stressed, as are some rivers used for hydropower generation and some aquifers where water is extracted for mining and oil/gas operations.

Fortunately, most of the systems that are highly stressed already have water plans in place or in development. The majority have clear environmental water goals and some pathways to achieve those goals.

The report reinforces the Commission's call for transparent monitoring and assessment to increase our understanding of Australia's water resources.

In the Commission's view, properly managing overuse begins with establishing sustainable water extraction regimes, early in the water planning process so that recovery measures are not needed.

Source: National Water Commission

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