Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme:
2014–15 Performance

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Environment Protection Authority

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Environment Protection Authority
59 Goulburn Street, Sydney NSW 2000
PO Box A290, Sydney South NSW 1232
Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)
Phone: 131 555 (NSW only – environment information and publications requests)
Fax: +61 2 9995 5999
TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 131 555
Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 131 555
Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au
Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au

Report pollution and environmental incidents
Environment Line: 131 555 (NSW only) or info@environment.nsw.gov.au
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What is the Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme?

The Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme (the Scheme) involves a system of salt credits which industries can buy and trade. Industries use these credits to discharge their salty water into the Hunter River, but only when the river contains adequate fresh water to dilute the salt and maintain water quality. The Scheme therefore balances the amount of salt that industry can discharge with the naturally occurring salt in the river.

River flow is measured at a series of monitoring points along the river. When flows are low no discharges are allowed; however, during periods of high flow, limited discharge can occur but only if the industry has sufficient salt credits. When flood flows occur, discharges are allowed up to an agreed salinity goal. The river is divided into three sectors for the purposes of the scheme, with salinity goals set for each sector.

The scheme is administered by the NSW Department of Primary Industry – Water under a service agreement with the NSW Environment Protection Authority guided by the Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme Operations Committee. The Committee includes representatives from State Government, industry and the community.

What is the purpose of the Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme?

The Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme has been designed to balance the water quality needs of users (such as agriculture) with the discharge needs of industry (mining, electricity generators). Overall, salinity is kept to an appropriate level by only allowing discharges during high flow or flood events and balancing the amount of salt that industry can discharge with the naturally occurring salt in the river.

The Hunter River naturally contains high levels of salt as a result of salty groundwater inflows and the Scheme monitors these levels to ensure that industry discharges only occur when natural salinity levels are appropriately low. By balancing the amount of salt that industry can discharge with the naturally occurring salt in the river, the Scheme helps to manage the impact of industrial discharges on the health of the river and the surrounding environment and ensures that the water is suitable for local primary producers to use for irrigation purposes.

How did the Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme perform in 2014–15?

Salinity is measured by determining the electrical conductivity (EC) of water. EC estimates the amount of total dissolved salts in the water and is measured in micro Siemens per centimetre (µS/cm). Salt water has an EC of around 55,000 µS/cm. Drinking quality water usually has an EC of between 600 and 1200 µS/cm.

During periods of low flow, the Hunter River may experience periods of naturally elevated levels of salinity as demonstrated in the graphs below. This is a result of naturally salty groundwater flow and is not related to industry discharges.

Scheme performance during industry discharge events

★★★★★ Salinity goal not exceeded

★★★★ Salinity goal exceeded for 1 discharge period

★★★ Salinity goal exceeded for 2 – 4 discharge periods

★★ Salinity goal exceeded for 5 – 9 discharge periods

★ Salinity goal exceeded for 10 or more discharge periods

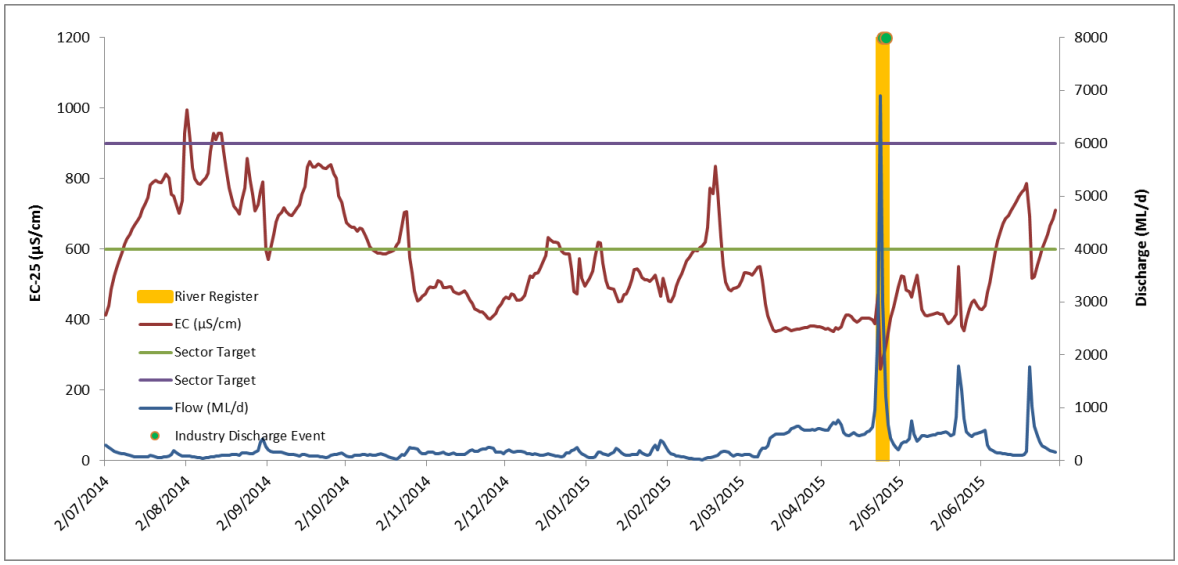
During 2014–15, Scheme participants had three opportunities to discharge saline water. No discharge opportunities occurred in the latter half of 2014; however, in 2015, discharge opportunities occurred in both April and May. Flood flows occurred in the upper, middle and lower sectors in April 2015.

The information below provides a summary of salinity and flow information in the upper, middle and lower sectors of the Hunter River over the year. Salinity results are compared to the established salinity goals which have been set for the three sectors of the Hunter River. The salinity goals were not exceeded during industry discharge events.

Upper Sector: Hunter River upstream of Denman – Graph A

The salinity goal for the Upper Sector is 600 µS/cm during high flows (shown below as a solid green line) and 900 µS/cm during flood flows (shown below as a solid purple line). There was one industrial discharge reported during the 2014–15 year for the Upper Sector participants. This discharge occurred in high rainfall in late April.

The elevated levels shown in the graph are not related to any discharge from the coal mining or power generation industries but are due instead to naturally salty groundwater flow.

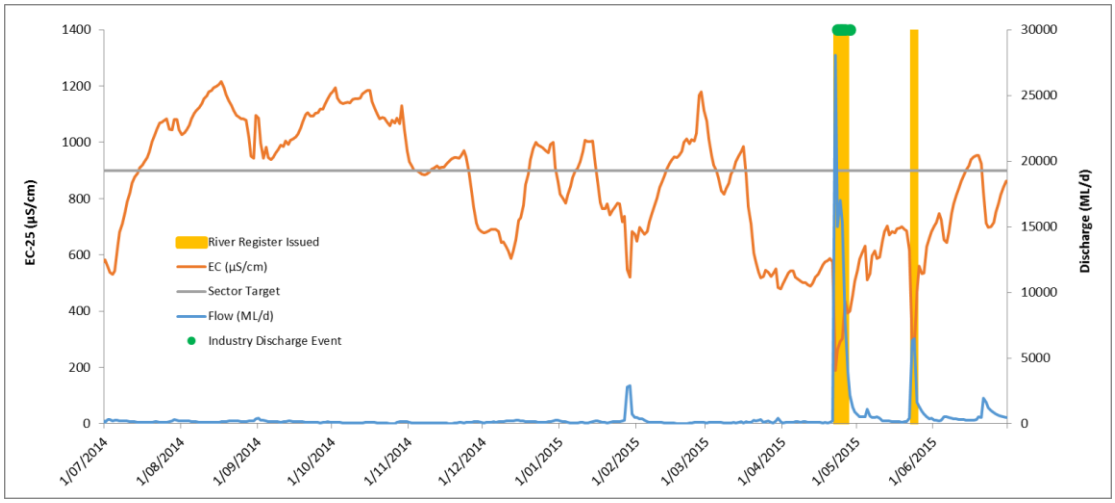


Graph A: Maximum Salinity and Minimum Flow – Hunter River at Denman

Middle Sector: from Denman to the junction of the Hunter River and Glennies Creek – Graph B

The salinity goal for the Middle Sector is 900µS/cm and is shown below as a solid grey line. The majority of industry participants in the middle sector discharged during the flood flow period in late April (23–26 April 2015). Besides this flood event, there were no other discharges to the river from industry participants in the middle sector.

There were no exceedances of the salinity goals during or immediately after the discharge event in late April. The elevated EC levels (salinity) shown in the graph are not related to any discharge from the coal mining or power generation industries but are instead due to naturally salty groundwater flow.



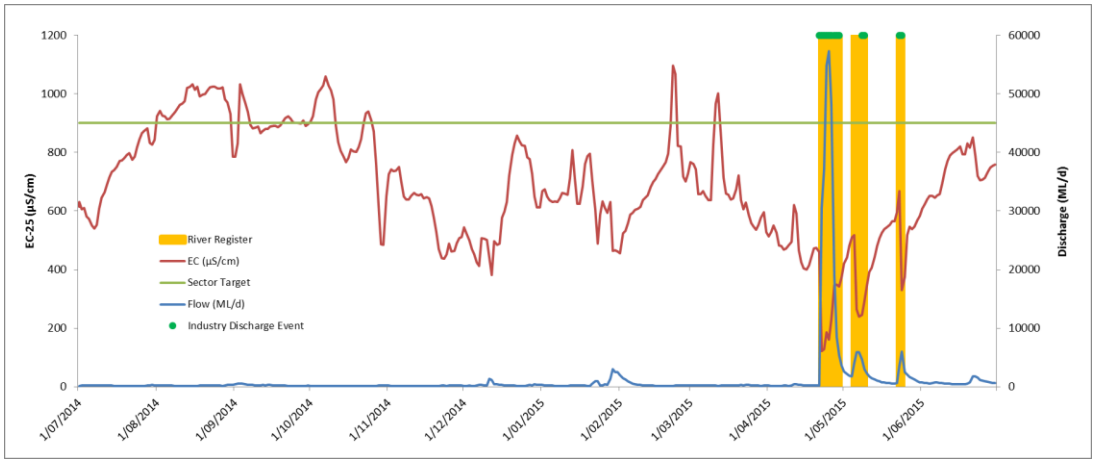
Graph B: Maximum Salinity and Minimum Flow – Hunter River Upstream of Glennies Creek.

Lower Sector: from the junction of the Hunter River and Glennies Creek to Singleton – Graph C

The salinity goal for the Lower Sector is 900 µS/cm, shown as a solid green line below. The majority of Lower Sector Scheme participants discharged during either the flood event in late April 2015 or the high flow conditions which existed after the 'flood', also in April. Other much smaller discharges also occurred in early and late May.

There were no exceedances of the salinity goals during or immediately after any discharge events in the Lower Sector during 2014–15.

The elevated levels shown in the graph below are not related to any discharge from the coal mining or power generation industries but are instead due to naturally salty groundwater flow.



Graph C: Maximum Salinity and Minimum Flow – Hunter River at Singleton

Further information

Further information on the operation of the Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme can be obtained online from the EPA at: Hunter River salinity trading scheme and from the NSW Department of Primary Industry – Water at: Hunter Salinity Trading Scheme: NSW Water Information

Follow the links from these webpages for information on river flow and electrical conductivity conditions in the Hunter River.

For more information on the operations of the HRSTS, telephone (02) 4908 6800 or email hrsts@epa.nsw.gov.au