



middle level
commissioners

And Administered IDBs

Culverting Policy

July 2026

This culverting policy applies to the Middle Level Commissioners (MLC) and their administered IDBs. Prior consent is needed from the MLC or IDB for new or replacement culverts on watercourses within the MLC or IDB districts under Section 23 of the Land Drainage Act 1991 or associated Byelaws.

This policy also relates to siphons under watercourses.

Policy Headline

Our principal objective is to avoid loss of capacity of drainage systems by retaining open watercourses with accessible corridors of open land on either side, avoiding loss of, or impact to, habitat and ecology. The culverting of watercourses will not be consented unless there is a robust case that there is no reasonably practical alternative, with adequate mitigation and compensation catered for.

The replacement of existing culverts will be considered for consent if there is no reasonably practical alternative, with adequate mitigation and compensation catered for, or the culvert is required for the effective operations of the MLC and/or IDB.

Rationale and Factors

Most Risk Management Authorities (which include MLC and IDBs) are opposed to the unnecessary culverting, piping or filling of watercourses due to the impacts on drainage, flooding and the natural environment.

All consent applications will need to include an assessment of all relevant factors, including but not limited to:

- Culvert size/capacity: No culvert smaller than 600mm diameter will be consented.
- Impact on flood risk and flow.
- Inclusion of freeboard within the design.
- Risk of erosion.
- Performance in high and low flows.
- Risk of blockage and associated management.
- Ability to inspect the condition of the culvert, incl. access chambers.

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- Effects of climate change and land shrinkage.
- Impact on ecology; Loss of open habitat and habitat connectivity.
- Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.
- Impact on other existing or future drainage connections.
- Pollution investigation and management.
- Future repair and maintenance, incl. associated health & safety.
- Impact to amenity uses of watercourses (e.g. Navigation and angling).
- Ownership of the culvert.

Mitigation and Compensation

The following mitigation and/or compensation measures will also need to be addressed, including but not limited to:

- Ensuring the culvert is of a minimum viable length to facilitate the applicant's objectives.
- Removing a culvert and/or reinstatement or creation of open channel habitat of equivalent length elsewhere in the district. This could be enabled by provision of funding to MLC/IDB or another party.
- Suitable environmental enhancements in the local area.
- Commuted maintenance fees to MLC/IDB for the additional maintenance and operational costs associated with working around culverts (If the MLC or IDB is agreeable).
- Ecological considerations integrated in the design e.g. mammal ledges, fish/eel passage and softer engineering, where appropriate.