



## Reassessing the planetary boundary for freshwater consumption

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This presentation reviews the conceptual and quantitative foundation of the recently suggested ‘planetary boundary’ for freshwater (i.e. the volume of human ‘blue’ water consumption that is deemed to be tolerable; see Rockström et al. in Nature 2009). It also proposes ways forward to refine and reassess this planetary boundary. As a key element of such a revision we provide a bottom-up quantification of local water availabilities taking account of environmental flow requirement in a spatially explicit manner and using five different methods to estimate these flow requirements with a global dynamic hydrology and vegetation model (LPJmL). Our analysis suggests that the planetary boundary for freshwater consumption may adopt a value of about 2800 km<sup>3</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> (which is the average of an uncertainty range of 1100–4500 km<sup>3</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>). This is notably lower than the original suggestion based on a simpler top-down analysis that relied on some global estimates of environmental flow requirements (4,000 km<sup>3</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>, the lower value of an uncertainty range of 4000–6000 km<sup>3</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>). Although assessed with spatial detail, this new estimate remains provisional, pending further refinement by analyses of local water accessibility and further constraints up-scaled to the global domain, including study of cascading impacts on Earth system properties. Nonetheless, with a current blue water consumption of >1,700 km<sup>3</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>, it appears that the freshwater boundary appears is being approached fast, and perhaps faster than suggested earlier. Thus, design opportunities to remain within this boundary are imperative - we argue that their comprehensive quantification requires analysis of tradeoffs with other planetary boundaries such as those for land use and climate change.