

Draft amended Barossa Water Allocation Plan

Barossa's Water Allocation Plan (developed in 2009) is being amended to reflect changes in climate, scientific data and for the first time, First Nations cultural objectives. The Northern and Yorke Landscape Board is amending the plan using updated science and monitoring data for the surface water and groundwater resources and water-dependent ecosystems.

The Board is consulting with community, First Nations organisations and stakeholders before presenting the plan to the Minister for Climate, Environment and Water for approval.

Water allocation plans must be reviewed within 10 years of adoption. However, a review can also happen at any time if there is a reason to, for example if a new risk to the water resource is identified. This draft plan incorporates a new approach aimed at providing greater flexibility for more responsive reviews to be undertaken when needed, for example if the established triggers are breached posing potential increased risks to the water resources or ecosystems.

Background

Updated data has provided information about the recent and modelled future availability of water resources, the observed and potential impacts of different levels of extraction, and climate variability on water resources and ecosystems.

Over the last 30 years, the Barossa's water resources have been declining in availability and condition due to below average rainfall. As a result, there has been infrequent water flow through creeks and waterways, reduced recharge of aquifers, and declining health and condition of water-dependent ecosystems such as permanent pools.

This has led to increasing trends in salinity of groundwater and surface water systems, reduced reliability of supply of water resources, and led to detrimental impacts on water ecosystems.

Observed trends of reduced water resource capacity (due to less rainfall and recharge) combined with current levels of extraction and use of water resources are not within identified levels of sustainable use in some areas of the Barossa. This combination has the potential to significantly increase risks to the future reliability of water resources for extraction and to water-dependent ecosystems.

Why do we need to update the plan?

Data used to create the current 2009 plan is now outdated, and climate events in recent decades, such as the Millennium drought, have resulted in altered patterns and trends that have had negative impacts on water resources and ecosystems.

Updated modelling and data for water resources provides improved understanding of the current and predicted future availability of water; what happens if more or less water is used, and the potential effects climate variability may have on water resources and ecosystems in the Barossa.

Data collected over the last 30 years confirms that rainfall, run-off, and recharge have all declined, and in many areas of the Barossa the decline has been more severe than previously predicted by models. Current levels of extraction and use of water resources, combined with these observed declining trends, has been identified as not sustainable leading to increased potential risks to the quantity and quality of water resources and ecosystems.

This new draft Plan aims to address this increased risk by incorporating a flexible and adaptable management approach to better facilitate reviews and amendments, to ensure it remains an effective tool for managing the water resources and ecosystems within the Barossa Prescribed Water Resources Area (PWRA). Within the plan's 10-year life, this approach will help test whether the plan is appropriate. It will also inform future amendments, enabling policies to be updated based on best-available information and evidence.

There are legislative requirements that the Plan must meet, and other management options that sit outside of these requirements.

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Partially unbundled licencing

The draft Plan includes a change from fully bundled water licencing to 'partially unbundled' licencing.

The new 'partially unbundled' water licences, have the water entitlement included in the water licence, but the annual water allocation is a separate (or 'unbundled') document.

Partially unbundled licencing enables adjustments of the annual water allocation in response to the status and condition of the water resource. Adjustments allow time for the water resource to recover, e.g. flows in surface water systems and recharge in groundwater systems, before full allocations are reinstated.

In the Barossa there is significant potential for variation in the availability of water resources, depending on climate and rainfall. Because this results in rapid changes in surface water systems and more gradual changes in groundwater systems, there is an increased need for contemporary Plans to incorporate flexible and adaptable management that is appropriate for the respective water resource types.

The change to partially unbundled licencing aims to support an access framework that facilitates the equitable and sustainable use of the prescribed water resources.

First Nations cultural objectives

For the first time, First Nations cultural objectives have been considered when forming the draft Plan.

The objectives have been identified through consultation with the people of the three First Nations (Ngadjuri, Peramangk and Kurna) whose Country includes the Barossa. They include supporting healthy natural water ecosystems through conscious management that provides for the habitat and lifecycle needs of native plants and animals of the systems.

More information

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Water licence

- Not required for stock, domestic or First Nations cultural purposes
- Is personal property and relates to particular consumptive pool
- Lists the wells, dams and watercourse pumps through which water can be taken
- Provides a Water Access Entitlement (WAE)

Water access entitlement

- Issued under the water licence
- Mortgageable component
- Subject to water licence conditions (such as the consumptive pool and where water can be taken from)
- Comprised of a number of entitlement shares (eg. 100 shares)

Value of entitlement shares

- Determined by the volume of water that is to be allocated from each consumptive pool
- Allocated water from each consumptive pool is determined by the Minister from time to time by notice in the Gazette

Water allocation

- Issued under a water access entitlement and based on the value of entitlement shares
- Lasts for 12 months (except for carryover approved via the plan)
- Subject to the conditions on the water licence (such as the consumptive pool and where water can be taken from)

How to have your say

Consultation helps shape the final policies to be included in the water allocation plan. During the formal consultation process, the public has the opportunity to have a say and provide feedback on the proposed management policies.

During the statutory consultation period in 2025, the Board will make direct contact with water users, provide online information and portals for questions and comments, along with drop-in sessions. All information will also be available on the Northern and Landscape Board website at www.landscape.sa.gov.au/ny/get-involved/have-your-say