

Barossa water decline informs amended plan

The Barossa Leader

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A “flexible and adaptive management approach” to water resources is being proposed by the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board, in its draft Barossa Water Allocation Plan Amendment, released for community consultation this week.

According to the Board, a water allocation plan provides equitable water allocations for users, while maintaining the health of water-dependent ecosystems.

Barossa’s amended plan reflects changes in climate and scientific data and is designed to be more responsive to environmental triggers.

“Rainfall, run-off and recharge have all declined in the Barossa in the past 30 years and that decline has been more severe than models predicted,” said Northern and Yorke Landscape Board General Manager Tony Fox.

“Reduced flows through our creeks and waterways are having an impact on the health of our water ecosystems and the latest modelling has shown that the current levels of water extraction are not sustainable.

“The amended plan aims to address this by allowing ongoing reviews and amendments within the life of the 10-year plan.”

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.

The Board has worked on updating and amending the plan since 2020.

Workshops, forums and surveys during 2022 and 2023 presented the science and monitoring data and provided an opportunity for discussions about management options.

Targeted engagement with the Ngadjuri, Peramangk and Kaurna First Nations people occurred to incorporate First Nations’ water interests for the first time.

“Water is a precious resource. There is a limit to how much is available for use on an ongoing basis, and so it is important to provide certainty to current and future users of water, particularly to those whose livelihoods depend on it,” said Mr Fox.

Following the current statutory public consultation, the Board will seek approval for the plan from the Minister for Climate, Environment and Water and once the plan is in place, water users can apply for a licence, transfer water between users as well as a range of other activities subject to the rules and limits of the plan.

Locals and water users can have their say via the YourSAy website, with the consultation open until the end of August 2025. Drop-in sessions hosted by the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board will be held at Lyndoch, Tanunda, Angaston and Nuriootpa on July 31 and August 1 for in-person discussion and questions.