How a water allocation plan can manage water resources – unbundled water rights

Water allocation plans set out the rules for ensuring that the take and use of prescribed water resources is sustainable. A water allocation plan can include monitoring and evaluation requirements to ensure usage and ecological health is being tracked. This information will help over time to test whether the policies in a water allocation plan are working.

Water rights and responsibilities for water resources managed through a Water Allocation Plan can be 'unbundled' or 'partially unbundled', which means they are described and specified on separate authorisations (rather than described on one licence document).

Separating (or unbundling) water licences into different components allows for a range of options to be put in place to manage issues with the take and use of water. For example, this can allow for quicker and more efficient transfer of water rights, and can allow for varying annual allocation volumes to help manage seasonal or long-term variations in water availability and water resource conditions.

The separate water management authorisations are:

A. **Water access entitlement:** provides an ongoing right to a specified share of water available for allocation from a prescribed water resource and is issued on a Water Licence. Water access entitlements are granted for a specified share in a Consumptive Pool.

B. **Water allocation:** the right to take a specific volume of water for a given period of time, not exceeding 12 months, based on the volume of water available for allocation in that period. It is the volume of water endorsed on a water account for use within the current water use year. Allocations are granted based on the number of water access entitlements held (or, the share of the water resource held). Allocations are granted and can be transferred according to the rules in a water allocation plan.

C. **Water resource works approval:** permission to construct, operate and maintain works for the purpose of taking water from a prescribed water resource at a specific location and in a particular manner.

D. **Site use approval:** permission to use the water at a specific site for a particular purpose. A site use approval may be used to manage issues such as salinity, which arise as a result of applying water to land.

Information sheets

A package of information will assist in discussions at the workshop on 22 November 2022. The information sheets provide background details and set out the issues Barossa water resources are facing and what the Plan can do to manage those issues:

#1: Introduction and background

#2: Surface water and ecosystems

#3: Groundwater

#4: Barossa ecological summary 2022

#5: Issues and management options

The Minister can also manage issues with a variable quantity of water (for example during periods of low water availability) through consumptive pools. The definition of a consumptive pool is:

Consumptive Pool: the part of a prescribed water resource that is available for authorised take of water under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*. The Minister determines the volume of water available in each consumptive pool guided by the rules in the water allocation plan. Consumptive pools may help manage the impacts of climate change – in dry years when there are water supply issues due to a lack of rain, the consumptive pool may be reduced in recognition of there being less water in the system that year to share between the different users of water.

Authorisations A and B are personal property and can be sold or transferred to another person. Authorisations C and D regard approvals which are attached to the land and therefore cannot be transferred.

A water resource may not need to be fully unbundled – Authorisations C and D may not always be necessary. The level of unbundling will depend on what management actions are required to best manage issues related to the take and use of water.

One or a combination of the management authorisations could be used to manage the take and use of water from the surface water and groundwater resources in the Barossa. Figure 1 provides greater description of each authorisation to help guide

discussions on the policy options.

For the purpose of managing issues in the Barossa, the most relevant authorisations are water access entitlements and water allocations (Authorisations A and B). Consumptive pools may also help share water when availability is impacted by a lack of rainfall.

Management options are presented in Information Sheet #4 and these will be discussed further at the November workshop.

Why are licences unbundled?

Unbundled water rights allow for the following:

- A clear distinction between an ongoing right to access water (water access entitlement) and the actual volume received (allocation)
- Quicker and more efficient transfer of water access entitlements and water allocations
- The volume of water available for allocation each year can be announced based on the conditions being faced at the time and allows for better management for seasonal or long term variations in the water resource's condition
- Tailored policies can be developed for managing the impacts of taking and using water

More information

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Figure 1: Water management authorisations

