

Barossa Water Allocation Plan – Pre-consultation Report



This report provides a summary of the activities and outcomes of communication and engagement activities undertaken by the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board as part of a non-statutory pre-consultation period for the draft amended Barossa Water Allocation Plan.

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1. Introduction

This document is the pre-consultation report for the draft amended Water Allocation Plan for the Barossa Prescribed Water Resources Area (the draft Plan). This report outlines:

- The consultation process and comments/submissions received through consultation (section 2),
- The next proposed steps to complete the final draft amended Plan as a result of the statutory consultation process (section 3).

1.1 Background

The Barossa Prescribed Water Resources Area (PWRA) is located approx. 60 km north east of Adelaide in South Australia, within the Northern and Yorke (NY) Landscape Management Region (Figure 1.) and intersects two local government areas, Light Regional Council and The Barossa Council, and three First Nations Countries, Ngadjuri, Peramangk and Kurna. The area includes the towns of Nuriootpa, Tanunda, Angaston and Lyndoch.

The groundwater resources of the Barossa PWRA was prescribed on 1 July 1989, followed by the watercourse resources on 14 May 1992, and the surface water resources on 17 December 1998, and finally the water resources of the Greenock area were added on 19 May 2005. The first Water Allocation Plan (the inaugural Plan) was adopted in December 2000, which was replaced with the current Plan on 18 June 2008. The prescription covers the groundwater, surface and watercourse water resources of the Barossa PWRA.

A statutory review of the 2008 Plan was conducted by the (then) Adelaide Mt Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board (the NRM Board) and subsequently the Board resolved to draft an amended Plan (the draft Plan), with the NRM Board's Water Advisory Committee providing oversight to the development of the draft Plan, including community engagement strategies. The Water Advisory Committee was comprised of members of the NRM Board and key stakeholders with an interest in water management in the Barossa and was supported by staff from the regional NRM Board and the (then) Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources who provided technical, planning and administrative advice. Following the commencement of the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019* (the Act) that defined the Barossa PWRA as being located within the Northern and Yorke Landscape region, the new Northern and Yorke Landscape Board (the Board) continued the WAP amendment process with the Board's Barossa WAP Advisory Group (Advisory Group) and support from staff from the Landscape Board and the Department for Environment and Water.

Section 55 of the Act outlines the measures that need to be undertaken with regard to consultation associated with the amendment of a water allocation plan. It outlines the need to provide for a period of formal public consultation for at least 2 months from the time the draft Plan is released to the public. In seeking approval from the Minister to adopt the Plan, the Board must provide the Minister a report on the consultation undertaken for the draft Plan. The report on the consultation processes is required to provide information about any matters raised during consultation and may propose amendments to the draft Plan based on the feedback received during this period.

This pre-consultation report has been developed in accordance with section 55(4) of the Act and has been prepared as a preliminary advisory document to support the development and completion of the draft amended Plan in preparation for the statutory formal public consultation period and the ultimate adoption of the amended Water Allocation Plan for the Barossa Prescribed Water Resources Area by the relevant Minister (for Environment and Water).



Figure 1. Barossa Prescribed Water Resources Area

2. Development of the draft amended Plan

The Barossa WAP Project Team (Project Team) (including Board and DEW staff) have worked closely with the stakeholder representative Advisory Group throughout the development of the draft amended Plan. The Project Team and Advisory Group have held monthly meetings and workshops to provide input into policy and management strategy development prior to finalising the draft amended Plan for broader community pre-consultation.

As part of the development of the draft amended Plan, the Board acknowledged the need to engage with licensees and the community in a meaningful and consistent manner. To that end, a Pre-Consultation Communication and Engagement Plan was developed and endorsed (Appendix 1).

The phases of activities in the Plan are detailed below and include:

- Phase 1 - Preliminary stakeholder engagement via the Advisory Group
- Phase 2 - Development and testing of policies via pre-consultation engagement activities

2.1 Phase 1 – Preliminary stakeholder engagement

Purpose: For the Project Team and the Advisory Group to progress the development of the policies and management strategy options of the draft amended Plan for presentation and discussion with the community via pre-consultation engagement activities.

2.1.1 Phase 1 engagement activities

A Pre-consultation Communication and Engagement Plan was developed to guide the activities to be undertaken to assist the development of the draft amended Plan.

Monthly meetings of the Advisory Group also examined historical extraction and use of the water resources of the Barossa PWRA, and identified the key stakeholders and likely key concerns that may be raised during the pre-consultation period, based on previous discussions and engagement processes undertaken for the current WAP. This helped to guide the strategies and activities for each of the stakeholders.

The Pre-consultation Communication and Engagement Plan outlined the following key activities to be undertaken:

- Advisory Group meetings
- In-person workshop for water licensees and interested stakeholders
- Online webinar workshop for water licensees and interested stakeholders
- Your SAs webpage containing reference material and an online survey for water licensees and interested stakeholders
- Internal communications with the Board and with the staff of the NY Landscape Board and Department for Environment and Water
- External communications via existing stakeholder networks including local government, Regional Development Australia, Barossa Australia, Barossa Improved Grazing Group, Primary Producers SA

Note, a separate targeted Communications and Engagement Plan was developed for the specific engagement activities planned for the three First Nations, with the key purpose of building

relationships and establishing engagement protocols and developing the draft content of the inaugural First Nations Heritage Water chapter of the draft amended Plan. This involved a series of face-to-face workshops and field trips with nominated representatives from each Nation. Efforts were focused on discussing the content and details of the chapter and gaining consensus on agreed cultural values and objectives to be incorporated in the inaugural chapter of the draft amended Plan.

2.1.2 Phase 1 outcomes

Monthly meetings of the Advisory Group were held from May 2022 through to current, June 2023.

Below summarises the key focus items of these meetings to date:

- updates on related Barossa water projects including the Water Security Strategy and New Water Project
- draft WAP objectives, water management strategies and policies
- updates on groundwater, surface water and ecological science and monitoring
- updates to Water Affecting Activities policies
- development of the Pre-consultation Communications and Engagement Plan and review of outcomes of engagement activities
- structure and content for chapters of the draft amended WAP
- updates on the timeline for the draft amended WAP

2.2 Phase 2 – Development and testing of management strategies

Purpose: To engage with stakeholders about specific options being considered in the development of the water management strategies of the draft amended Plan and seek feedback on the proposed policy approaches.

2.2.1 Phase 2 engagement activities

Key engagement activities included:

- In-person forum – 22 November 2022
 - held at The Barossa Cellars conference centre at the head office of Barossa Australia
 - preparation of fact sheets which summarised the water licensing regime, the updated science, and the management strategies being considered for the draft amended Plan (Appendices 2a-e)
 - presentations of the updated science, water licensing and allocation, and workshop of the proposed draft WAP objectives and management strategies (Appendix 3)
 - Attendees x 20
- Online webinar workshop – 24 January 2023
 - use of Eventbrite registration and Zoom webinar tools
 - promotion via existing stakeholder communication networks including local government, RDA, Barossa Australia, BIGG, PPSA
 - promotion via Board website, Facebook and Yakka e-newsletter
 - presentations of the updated science, water licensing and allocation, and draft WAP objectives and management strategies (Appendix 4)
 - use of the Mentimeter tool for live interactive surveying and responses from attendees regarding the management strategies being considered
 - Attendees x 15
- Your SAy online campaign – January to April 2023
 - provision of the fact sheets and technical reports relating to the draft amended Plan
 - portal for questions and feedback
 - online survey to gather responses regarding the management strategies being considered
 - promotion via existing stakeholder communication networks including local government, RDA, Barossa Australia, BIGG, PPSA
 - promotion via Board website, Facebook and Yakka e-newsletter
 - Surveys x 23, questions x 1

2.2.2 Phase 2 outcomes

In phase 2, a range of updated science and monitoring technical information was provided to support the draft WAP objectives and proposed management strategies that were discussed and/or feedback and responses sought from water licensees and stakeholders.

Summary notes from the in-person forum, the Mentimeter report of the webinar responses, and the Your SAy survey analysis report are included as Appendices 5a-c.

The outcomes of all three engagement activities are summarised below:

DRAFT WAP OBJECTIVES

- generally supported by all attendees and respondents

PROPERTY DETAILS

- Grape growers and agricultural properties were the largest categories (webinar and survey)
- Property scale was mostly 10-50 hectares (8) or >50 hectares (10) (survey)
- Water source used was mostly a combination of surface water (17), imported water (13) and/or groundwater (12) (survey)
- Business/personal details were provided by 15 survey respondents
- Property location details were provided by 17 survey respondents

OPTION 1: INCLUDE THRESHOLDS THAT REPRESENT 'UNACCEPTABLE' RESOURCE CONDITION

Response Category	Mentimeter	Survey
STRONGLY/AGREE	7	13
STRONGLY/DISAGREE	2	8

COMMENTS:

- Views and impacts will depend on type of enterprise
- Triggers need to be set well before conditions become catastrophic
- Conditions and water use varies between management zones
- Positives – protect environment and water resources,
- Negatives – economic impacts, need guaranteed imported water and water security for it to work, needs to account for the relevant lag in resource response

OPTION 2: ADAPTIVE ALLOCATIONS IN LINE WITH RESOURCE CONDITION

Response Category	Mentimeter	Survey
STRONGLY/AGREE	6	14
STRONGLY/DISAGREE	0	8

COMMENTS:

- Timing of notification of allocation reductions is critical for business management
- Groundwater is likely to be easier to manage triggers
- Without removing barriers to flows reductions in surface water allocations are likely to be ineffective
- Positives – maintain income, more equitable access,
- Negatives – environmental damage, need to implement in conjunction with water security, should be scaled to level of use, resources are already self-limiting
- Timing – Now (Menti - 4, Survey - 7), Later (Menti - 3, Survey - 11)
- Location – All areas (Menti - 4, Survey - 12), Targeted (Menti - 3, Survey - 6)
- Need a framework with flexible application
- Would allow for adaptive management of variable resources

OPTION 3: PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL FLOWS THROUGH THE SYSTEM

Response Category	Mentimeter	Survey
STRONGLY/AGREE	6	14
STRONGLY/DISAGREE	0	8

COMMENTS:

- Noting of precedent implementation for Flows for the Future project with limited success to date due to low rainfall, voluntary program can reduce outcomes
- Timing – Now (Menti - 5, Survey - 12), Later (Menti - 3, Survey - 7)
- Location – All areas (Menti - 2, Survey - 12), Targeted (Menti - 4, Survey - 6)
- Regulation – Voluntary (Menti - 1, Survey - 9), Mandated (Menti - 5, Survey - 11)
- Positives – environmental benefits, groundwater recharge, move salt loads out of the system,
- Negatives – need to target large dams, need to implement in conjunction with water security,
- Likely to impact a small number of water users, compensation should be considered
- Need to take into account location of existing storage capacity

OPTION 4: THRESHOLD FLOW RATES FOR WATERCOURSE EXTRACTIONS

Response Category	Mentimeter	Survey
STRONGLY/AGREE	6	13
STRONGLY/DISAGREE	0	7

COMMENTS:

- Need to consider that watercourses and dams are linked
- Facilitating off-stream dams and delivering the New Water Project will assist
- Timing – Now (Menti - 6, Survey - 10), Later (Menti - 0, Survey - 6)
- Location – All areas (Menti - 3, Survey - 12), Targeted (Menti - 3, Survey - 6)
- Regulation – Voluntary (Survey - 7), Mandated (Survey - 11)
- Positives – environmental and resource benefits, reduce current overuse,
- Negatives –negative media re wasting water, flows already restricted by large dams, permanent crops require permanent water, need to implement in conjunction with water security,
- There are practical difficulties relating to extraction infrastructure
- Voluntary approach is not likely to work
- The 'acceptable' flow rate is likely to be controversial

NOTE: OPTIONS 5-8 WERE INCLUDED IN THE SURVEY ONLY

OPTION 5: ENCOURAGE VOLUNTARY ACTIONS THAT MAY IMPROVE FLOWS VIA ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF THE PLAN

Survey Response Category		
SUPPORT	STRONGLY/AGREE 18	STRONGLY/DISAGREE 3
LOCATION	ALL AREAS 14	TARGETED 4

COMMENTS:

- Positives – environmental and resource benefits, voluntary approach would be good, allows flexibility and recognizes responsible users,
- Negatives –voluntary approach only works when resource availability is good, compensation would be required, targeted landholder approach would be best, those with large dams are not likely to participate, permanent crops require permanent water, need to implement in conjunction with water security,
- Use of grants or incentives would assist

OPTION 6: REDUCE WATER ACCESS ENTITLEMENTS TO REFLECT REDUCED CAPACITY OF THE RESOURCE

Survey Response Category		
SUPPORT	STRONGLY/AGREE 10	STRONGLY/DISAGREE 12
LOCATION	ALL AREAS 10	TARGETED 8

COMMENTS:

- Positives – would help balance use vs environmental benefits, more water available to the whole area, reduces water access to those that hold more than they require,
- Negatives –need better forecasting to support business management, economic impacts, need to implement in conjunction with water security, doesn't allow for fluctuations in rainfall patterns, may make small landholders unviable,

OPTION 7: DAM VOLUME REDUCTIONS

Survey Response Category		
SUPPORT	STRONGLY/AGREE 12	STRONGLY/DISAGREE 9
LOCATION	ALL AREAS 13	TARGETED 4
REGULATION	VOLUNTARY 7	MANDATED 10

COMMENTS:

- Positives – would help balance use vs environmental benefits, reduces water access to those that hold more than they require,
- Negatives –many dams are critical to business management, smaller dams may lead to increased demand on imported water, need to implement in conjunction with water security, will reduce fire response ability, may make small landholders unviable, this would be a highly emotionally charged issue,

OPTION 8: DAM REMOVALS

Survey Response Category		
SUPPORT	STRONGLY/AGREE 11	STRONGLY/DISAGREE 10
LOCATION	ALL AREAS 13	TARGETED 4
REGULATION	VOLUNTARY 10	MANDATED 8

COMMENTS:

- Positives – would help restore some of the historical natural flows, fairer for downstream users,
- Negatives –productive land may become unproductive, should only target dams identified as superfluous or excessive, need to implement in conjunction with water security, may cause environmental impacts due to increase in off-stream storages, possible negative impacts on water-dependent fauna, should not apply in Eden Valley where dams are often the only water source available,

3. Next steps for the draft amended Plan

3.1. Phase 3 communications and engagement activities

3.1.1. Statutory consultation on the draft Plan

Purpose: To formally engage with stakeholders on the draft amended Plan and to seek their feedback on the content of the draft amended Plan.

In accordance with section 55 of the Act the Board will consult on the draft amended Plan as the next phase of the consultation process. The draft amended Plan is currently on track for public consultation to commence early in 2024, for a minimum two month period. The consultation process will be guided by a Communications and Engagement Strategy that will be approved by the Board and the Minister as part of the consultation approval process.

Key engagement activities likely to be included are:

- Public forums
- Meetings with key stakeholder groups
- Written submissions
- Web presence – use of the Board, stakeholder group and Your SAY websites
- Letters direct to licensees and other key stakeholders

Feedback received will be formally responded to and the key issues identified will be collated and addressed as part of a Consultation Report that will be submitted to the Board and the Minister.

3.1.2. Final amendments to the draft Plan

As a result of the formal consultation process, the Board will have considered all the comments made and recommended a number of changes to the final draft Plan. In addition, minor amendments will have been made to provide greater clarity, to improve readability or to add context that do not change the intent of the principles in the final draft Plan.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1: Pre-Consultation Communication and Engagement Plan

Appendix 2a: Introduction and background fact sheet

Appendix 2b: How a WAP can manage water resources fact sheet

Appendix 2c: 2019-20 surface water and groundwater status overview fact sheet

Appendix 2d: Barossa ecological summary 2022 fact sheet

Appendix 2e: Issues and management options fact sheet

Appendix 3: Agenda for the in-person Barossa WAP Forum held on 22 November 2022

Appendix 4: Agenda for the online webinar workshop held on 24 January 2023

Appendix 5a: Summary notes from the in-person forum on 22 November 2022

Appendix 5b: Mentimeter report of the webinar responses on 24 January 2023

Appendix 5c: Your SAy survey analysis report for January to April 2023