

Barossa Prescribed Water Resources Area

Adoption and implementation

The Barossa Water Allocation Plan 2009 has been amended to reflect updated climate and scientific information and to include First Nations cultural objectives. The Northern and Yorke Landscape Board revised the plan using contemporary science, monitoring data (**see new Surface Water and Groundwater factsheets with 2025 data**) and public feedback to support sustainable management of surface water, groundwater and water-dependent ecosystems. The amended plan will be submitted to the Minister for Climate, Environment and Water for approval, with implementation proposed for 1 July 2026.

Background

Over the last 30 years, the Barossa's water resources have been declining in availability and condition due to reduced rainfall and changing climate. 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 for water-dependent ecosystems.

Managing these risks requires a change in management approach. Informed by updated data and modelling, the amended plan incorporates climate variability, reliability and condition of water resources, and updated environmental water requirements. The amended plan introduces a more flexible framework that enables timely reviews when trigger points are exceeded, helping to address emerging risks to water resources and ecosystems.

The proposed changes to the management approach are detailed in the next sections.

Please note: Information provided in this fact sheet about proposed policies in the amended plan are indicative only and subject to change pending consideration of the amended plan by the Minister for Climate, Environment and Water.

Objectives

The objectives of this plan are to licence, allocate and manage native water (and water extraction infrastructure) and authorise water affecting activities in a manner which:

- Ensures that prescribed water resources are managed within acceptable resource condition limits.
- Maximises security of access to prescribed water resources for current and future users within the constraints of the resource.
- Provides protections for water-dependent ecosystems designed to maintain system sustainability.
- Provides for the flexible and variable use of water resources in response to seasonal climate variability and availability.
- Provides the ability to respond to declining resource condition at a consumptive pool scale.
- Recognises and incorporates the importance of water to First Nations people, and the existence of native title interests in water.
- Manages risks associated with the construction and use of infrastructure for extracting water, for undertaking water affecting activities including the storage and use of imported water or effluent on land.

Mar 2026

Plan submitted to Minister for approval

Adoption target

Plan approved in time for implementation on 1 Jul 2026

1 Jul 2026 target

Plan implemented and issuing of updated licences commences

First Nations

For the first time, **First Nations cultural objectives** have been incorporated into the plan.

Adoption and implementation Fact Sheet

New consumptive pools (management zones) and new policies

Surface/watercourse water consumptive pools = 18 based on sub-catchment areas and hydrological monitoring site locations.

Groundwater consumptive pools = 7 based on a combination of aquifer type and geographical location.

[View the interactive map.](#)

Two new purpose-based Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) and Captured Runoff Consumptive Pools have been established, each covering the entire Barossa Prescribed Water Resources Area (PWRA).

Upper extraction limits have been established for each pool equal to the total current volume allocated resulting in no new surface/watercourse water or groundwater volumes being available.

Allocations may only be transferred within the same consumptive pool (subject to assessment).

Major changes specific for groundwater

The major proposed changes for groundwater are:

- **Buffer distances** between new wells or increased extraction points, **to protect existing wells or groundwater dependent ecosystems**.
- To protect aquifer integrity, **thresholds** for recovered winter levels established in the **Upper Aquifer Central** and **Lower Aquifer Consumptive Pools**. If **exceeded**, pool licensees will **be notified**, and the Minister may **reduce allocations until the level recovers to above the threshold**.

Carryover

Groundwater: 10% of unused water can be carried over to the next water use year and will be deemed as first water used.

Surface/watercourse water: No carryover is permitted.

Transfers

Key principles taken into consideration for assessing applications:

- No net increase in water available for allocation.
- Can only transfer within the same consumptive pool.
- No net increase in dam capacity within a consumptive pool.
- Cannot transfer surface/watercourse water upstream of the licensed location.
- New or increased groundwater extraction must be outside of the specified buffer distance where relevant.
- New or increased watercourse extraction can only occur above the relevant specified threshold flow rate.

Major changes specific for surface/watercourse water

The major proposed changes for surface/watercourse are:

- **Upper extraction limits set to reflect a 25% reduction in the average water availability** and the likely ongoing and long-term decline in surface water availability as projected by climate models.
- **No net increase in dam capacity** as the level of dam development is already very high.
- **Allow for capture and re-use of additional runoff from new roofs and hard surfaces** (i.e. volume above the pre-development runoff could be taken and used).
- **Establish flow and permanent pool metrics to monitor the resource and ecosystem condition** and be used by the Minister to determine the most appropriate management response when thresholds are exceeded.
- Storage of imported water or effluent:
 - for untreated water must have no natural catchment and prevent leakage to the surrounding soils, surrounding land or a watercourse.
 - for treated water must be located outside of a watercourse and minimise the risk of overflow into a watercourse.
 - residual chlorine must not be intentionally discharged into a watercourse.

Partially unbundled water licences

The new plan includes a change from fully bundled water licences to partially unbundled licences which will be delivered as a separate process by the Water Licensing Branch of the Department for the Environment and Water.

The new partially unbundled water licences have the water entitlement included in the water licence, but the annual water allocation is a separate (unbundled) document. See '**Factsheet: Unbundled water rights**' for more information.

More information

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