

Western Mount Lofty Ranges Water Allocation Plan

FACT SHEET | OCTOBER 2013



Adoption of the Western Mount Lofty Ranges Water Allocation Plan

Community, industry and the environment in the Western Mount Lofty Ranges region will benefit from the adoption of a water allocation plan to provide water security for the future.

The water allocation plan (the plan) outlines how water will be managed to protect the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of this Prescribed Area for future generations. It is guided by the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004*, which provides the legal framework for sustainably managing South Australia's water resources for the benefit of all water users.

To do this, the plan is based on scientific investigations and considers the sustainable, long-term balance between all users - the general community, industry and our natural environment. It aims to manage water use by ensuring that new allocations are within sustainable limits and minimises the risks of new use on existing users.

This plan has been developed together with the local community and industry to ensure all needs, including the needs of the environment, are met.

Why are water allocation plans necessary?

Water allocation plans consider the current level of water use, the timing and purpose of this use, what the future use might be, and the best way to share the available water between users to ensure that people and the environment have a fair share of the resource.

Plans do this by outlining how taking water from prescribed water resources is managed through granting water licences and allocations, and include provisions for the transfer of licences and allocations between users. Water allocation plans also establish policies for activities such as the construction of wells and the building of dams, as well as principles for monitoring and reporting to ensure the water resource is protected.

Water allocation plans attempt to effectively balance social, economic and environmental water requirements, and in particular, take into account the needs of existing water users and protect them from the potential impacts of new users or people wanting more water.

What do I need to know?

There are a number of key areas within the plan that water users and the Western Mount Lofty Ranges community are likely to be most interested in and need to have some understanding about.



Natural Resources
Adelaide & Mt Lofty Ranges



Government
of South Australia



Permits for the construction of new dams

The plan protects existing users by minimising the risk of new dams having negative impacts on existing dams or downstream environmental assets.

Under the plan, no new dams within the catchment of a reservoir can be built for any purpose, unless there is an equivalent reduction in capacity elsewhere in the catchment. In other areas, including the Fleurieu and McLaren Vale catchment areas, there is capacity for new dams to be built, but they must undergo an assessment before a permit is granted.

Where the proposed dam is in, or near to, a wetland, an on-site assessment is undertaken on a case by case basis to determine if a new dam is likely to have a detrimental impact on an existing wetland.

In instances where a landholder wants to build, deepen or enlarge a dam with a capacity exceeding 5 ML or a dam with a wall height greater than 3 metres above the natural ground level, a development authorisation is needed under the *Development Act 1993*.

This is a local government process which also seeks input from the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board as part of its assessment process – thus negating the need for a separate dam permit. If you are unsure about whether to apply for a development authorisation or a dam permit, call 8273 9100 for the right advice.

New water allocations

Once the requirements of all existing water users have been determined, including completion of appeals arising from the licensing process, consideration will be given to the release of unallocated water for new water allocations, within the volumetric limits set by the plan.

While the plan contains rules for new water allocations, the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation will first need to determine where there is water available for new use, if this water should be released and if so what process will be followed to ensure all parties are given an equitable opportunity to apply for any of this water.

This process may take some time but is a responsible approach to sustainable water resource management.

Rollover allocations

The plan introduces the concept of rollover credits, allowing a portion of unused allocation from a previous year to be 'carried over' to following years.

This flexibility is particularly helpful to water users in managing the impacts of variable seasonal conditions and enables licence holders to build up a buffer or bank of water in good years to assist in dry years.

For underground water, the volume that can be rolled over is capped at 15% of the water allocation, providing for up to 115% of allocation to be taken over the following two years. For surface water, rollovers are capped at 10%, providing for up to 110% allocation to be taken in the following year only.





Applications for dam permits, new surface water allocations and transfers

To protect existing users and the environment, the following factors are amongst those considered as part of departmental assessments. The volume of:

- water available in the zone
- water available in the diversion limit (dam permits only)
- run-off available to the location of the proposed new dam
- run-off available to any water users downstream of the proposed new dam
- water available if there is a Fleurieu wetland downstream of the proposed new dam.

Applications for well permits

- The plan introduces buffer zones around existing wells and environmental assets to minimise the risk of any proposed new wells negatively impacting on existing wells or underground water-dependent ecosystems.

Well permits

The plan introduces buffer zones around existing wells and environmental assets to minimise the risk of any proposed new wells negatively impacting on existing wells or the environment.

The buffer zones are of varying diameters depending on location. The way they have been introduced is designed to limit situations where the buffer around a proposed new well overlaps with buffer zones around existing wells and valuable water-dependent ecosystems.

Transfer of allocations and water trade

The plan introduces the ability to transfer water allocations and outlines how these entitlements can be transferred under certain conditions.

Water licences and allocations are personal entitlements – they are tradeable assets. As with other applications relating to water, approval of an application for transfer is guided by the water allocation plan and occurs following a technical assessment which considers impacts or risks to the resource or any existing user.

Water transfers for groundwater can occur throughout the Prescribed Area subject to the above assessment however, the transfer of surface water or watercourse water is restricted to within the boundaries of a catchment or within a watercourse across the plains.



Securing low flows

Most water users within the Western Mount Lofty Ranges are experienced land managers that are very aware of local environmental patterns and needs, and understand the broader importance of a healthy system.

A fundamental principle of the water allocation planning process is to protect the region’s environmental assets and optimise water use for both environmental and productive purposes. To do this a commitment has been made to establish a longer term program focused on securing environmental flows particularly at critical times in the seasonal cycle.

The aim of the *Low Flows Program* is to re-establish natural flow regimes throughout the region to trigger regeneration of habitat and ecological processes and to create connectivity between isolated pools particularly between the end of summer and moving into autumn.

This program will initially be focused on background research and technical studies. It is already clear that there will not be one method that works in every situation – solutions will need to be tailored to individual situations.

A ‘low flow bypass’ is one way to secure low flows but will not be the best approach or method in every situation. Research continues into a range of strategies for securing low flows, strategic priorities and locations of low flow releases. During this development stage, input from the community will be invaluable and thoughts and ideas on ways to tackle this issue will be actively sought, welcomed and appreciated.

Discussions around the cost of securing low flows, and how this cost is covered, will also form part of the discussions. It is recognised that the securing of low flows provides a community/regional benefit, and any funding model will need to recognise this.

Ultimately, the aim is to achieve a clear outcome – re-establishment of more natural flow regimes, particularly in periods of low flows, in the most efficient and effective way possible.

A traditional dam needs to fill and overflow before any water flows into the watercourse below the dam. In a catchment where there are many dams, this delays the time when creeks start to flow and brings forward the time when flow stops for the year.

This shortens the flow season and has a significant impact on the plants and animals living in the creeks that depend on water, particularly in relation to their breeding cycles. It also lengthens the naturally stressful time that refuge pools stay isolated, increasing the risk that water quality in the pool becomes too poor, or that the pool dries up altogether.

Need more information?

To get more information about dam permits phone 8273 9100. To get more information about any other aspect of the water allocation plan or to discuss your personal circumstances phone 8463 6876.

