



Removal of the 15L/s Exemption in the Darwin Rural Water Control District

The Northern Territory Government has amended the Declaration of Exemptions under the Water Act. The new declaration removes the exemption for bores pumping less than 15L per second from licencing requirements under the Act.

This means people using water through bores, other than for stock and domestic use in the Darwin Rural Water Control District are required to obtain a Water Extraction Licence.

The exemption known as the '15 litre per second exemption' has been in place since the commencement of the Water Act in 1992. It was included as an exemption to the licencing requirement to assist with horticultural and agricultural development in the Darwin rural area.

Removing the exemption in the Darwin Rural Water Control District means that people who use bores other than for stock and domestic water use in the Darwin rural area are subject to the same licencing requirements as in all other water control districts in the Northern Territory.

Why has the Government removed the exemption?

The original intention of the exemption was to foster the development of agriculture and horticulture in the Darwin rural area. Since the exemption was introduced in 1992, and in particular in the last 10 years there has been increased competition for, and use of, groundwater resources in the region for residential development, industry development and horticultural and agricultural use.

The exemption has allowed for large volumes of water to be used without any corresponding monitoring and reporting to Water Resources Division.

By lifting the exemption, those using water other than for stock and domestic use will be subject to licence conditions, including the requirement to monitor and report on use, contributing to better overall management.

Does the exemption apply in any other water control districts?

No. The 15L per second exemption was unique to the Darwin Rural Water Control District and areas outside of water control districts.

How do I know if I am in the Darwin Rural Water Control District?

The Darwin Rural Water Control District encompasses the Darwin Rural area across to the Adelaide River, down to Acacia, across to Blackmore, and includes such areas as Humpty Doo, Lambells Lagoon, Acacia Hills, and Berry Springs.

Refer to the attached map.

What if I am on a reticulated water supply?

The removal of the exemption does not apply to you.



What is a water extraction licence?

A water extraction licence is an entitlement to take and use water. Water licences are not attached to land, although the licence does identify on which property the water can be used. Water licences are granted for bores or river pump sites.

Do I need to apply for a water licence?

You will require a water licence:

- If you are using water (groundwater or surface water) for purposes other than stock and domestic use, road construction and/or maintenance, or mining or petroleum activities.
- If you are located in the Darwin Rural Water Control District.
- If you do not have direct access to the source of water.

What about household or domestic use?

Will I need to be licenced to access water for my home?

Water for stock and domestic purposes in the Darwin Rural Water Control District area are not affected by the removal of this exemption. Stock and domestic use, as defined by the Water Act, is limited to domestic purposes, drinking water for grazing stock and irrigating a garden not exceeding 0.5 hectares (5,000 square metres).

When do the new rules apply?

The removal of the exemption takes effect as of 6 July 2016. From this date all those using water other than for stock and domestic water use will be required to hold a water extraction licence.

How do I get a water extraction licence?

The Minister for Environment and Natural Resources recently announced a six month extension for residential water users irrigating a garden larger than half a hectare (5,000sqm), to the 30 June 2017. The extension gives residents the opportunity to better assess their water usage and make decisions accordingly.

All other users are required to submit a licence application by 31 December 2016. Applicants will need to be able to provide information about their current water requirements.

There are several ways to determine current water usage including; meter readings; determining the amount of water applied per hectare, or using pump hours and flow rates. More information about calculating your water use is provided on the application form.

Staff from Water Resources Division will verify water usage including desktop assessments, data on cropping rates, registered bore records and property inspections. This may result in some licence applications being revised in consultation with the applicant.

Water Resources Division is also available to assist you with your application.

Is there an application fee?

There are no fees to apply for a water extraction licence in the Northern Territory. Applicants are required to meet advertising costs and to install and maintain an approved water meter. Applicants who apply prior to 31 December 2016 or 30 June 2017 for residential users will not be required to cover the costs of advertising a Notice of Intention to make a water licence decision.

Will I be charged for water?

No, water licensing is a tool used by Water Resources Division to manage the groundwater or surface water resource to ensure they maintain their integrity, are not degraded and remain sustainable into the future. It's about not running out of water.

How long will it take to make a decision about my licence application?

Once the water licence requests are verified, applications will be subject to the advertising processes described in the Water Act. This includes a 30 day period of the application request being subject to a public Notice of Intention to make a water licence decision. The application will then be assessed and submitted to the Controller of Water Resources for a decision.

This may take up to 6 months from the time of submitting the application.

How long is a water extraction licence issued for?

A water licence is typically granted for a 10 year period but longer term licences may be approved in special circumstances.

When I get a water extraction licence what am I required to do?

You will need to comply with all the licence conditions specified, including to:

- Install and maintain a water meter at your cost,
- Report monthly water use -pumpage/meter readings to Water Resources,
- Use no more than your maximum water entitlement, and
- Seek approval if you are using inline chemigation and or fertigation systems.

What happens if I take water without a licence?

It is prohibited to take and use water unless authorised or licensed under the Water Act. If you take and use water without a licence when it is required you will be liable for prosecution.

How can I find out more information?

Application forms, guides and supporting information are available from our website or you can contact Water Resources Division by phone, email or visit our front counter located on the 4th floor of the Goyder Centre, Palmerston.



Picture: Okra Crop in the Darwin Rural Area

For more information contact:

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