



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Removal of the 15L/s Exemption

#### Why are we doing this?

There are currently around 5,000 active production bores in the Darwin Rural Water Control District area. However, there are only 12 Water Extraction Licences that have been issued (including Power and Water Corporation's licence).

It is estimated that around 80% of water use in the region is unmonitored, unreported and occurs without any limitation on extraction. This makes proactive management of the overall water resource, difficult in the long term.

Increasing the proportion of water users who are subject to a licence and are then required to remain within an allocation and report their usage through meters, will improve the accuracy of our understanding of how much water is being used. Licencing provides a range of monitoring and management tools to protect individual water users and the sustainability of the resource overall.

#### What does Stock and Domestic Mean?

Water used for:

1. Domestic purposes of the owner or occupier, this includes water for washing; drinking and personal hygiene.
2. Drinking water for grazing stock, this refers to water consumed by stock for drinking, it does not include water used to irrigate a paddock for stock.
3. Irrigating a garden area less than half a hectare (5,000sqm or 1.24 acres) and used solely in connection with a dwelling on the land.

#### How big is half a hectare?

Half a hectare is the equivalent of 5,000sqm or 1.24 acres. It is around a quarter the size of the MCG. 5,000sqm therefore allows for a large garden.

#### Why half a hectare?

The half a hectare has been used in the description of Stock and Domestic use in the Water Act since its inception in 1992.

An area based threshold has been used rather than a volumetric threshold because setting a volume of water as a limit for stock and domestic water use would require everyone to be metered. Setting a land area allows for a large area of garden to be irrigated, but it does not limit or constrain the amount of water that can be used.

All jurisdictions use an area based threshold when defining stock and domestic use. The Northern Territory threshold of half a hectare is more generous than that found in other jurisdictions with Western Australia 0.2 hectare; Queensland 0.25 hectare; and South Australia and Victoria 0.4 hectare.

#### How do you check the area being watered?

As in other jurisdictions, establishing the area under irrigation is assessed using aerial imaging and advice and information from the landowner about the areas they are irrigating.

If a residential water user is not sure what area of their property is under irrigation they are invited to contact Water Resources who will work with them to determine the irrigation area.

Areas of irrigation 5,000sqm or less meet the definition of stock and domestic water use and are exempt from licensing.



### Who needs a licence

All water users that do not fall into the stock and domestic definition, this includes:

- (a) all commercial businesses large and small;
- (b) all horticultural and agricultural businesses;
- (c) schools;
- (d) council properties and parks;
- (e) caravan parks and tourist areas;
- (f) sporting facilities (golf course; bowls club; football ovals etc);
- (g) defence operations; and
- (h) residential water users watering a garden area larger than half a hectare.

### What do I need to do?

Impacted water users captured under (a) to (g) above are required to apply for a licence by 31 December 2016.

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.

### What happens if I don't apply for a licence?

If you are one of the categories above you will need a licence to extract water under the Act. Extracting water without a licence is a breach of the Water Act, unless you are an exempt user.

Most residential users will continue to be exempt and will not be affected because they are currently irrigating a garden less than 5,000sqm. Residential users irrigating greater than 5,000sqm can elect to irrigate a smaller garden area or apply for a water extraction licence. Only licence holders are required to be metered as a condition of the extraction licence.

At this stage, the priority is to encourage water dependant businesses, enterprises and services who were previously exempted from licencing to now apply for a water extraction licence.

These are likely to be some of the larger water users in the Darwin rural area. It is important that water use for businesses, enterprises and services is allocated under a licence and metered so that it is able to be monitored and reported as part of the overall water management of the region.

If eligible water users do not apply within the required timeframe, Water Resources will continue to encourage and allow for applications to be received. However, eligible users who do not apply for a licence through this current process may find that when they do seek a licence in the future that there may be limitations on what can be allocated to them.

Licensing is an important management tool to establish and quantify water use in a region so that decisions about ensuring there is a secure water supply for all users, including the environment, can be made.

### Why is Power and Water allowed to take water?

Power and Water extraction is licenced under the Water Act for up to 8,420 ML/year from the Koolpinyah Dolostone, but extract significantly less than this volume. The McMinns bore field has been an important component of the Darwin Region Water Supply since the 1960's.

As a licence holder, Power and Water has an agreed allocation amount and meters and reports their extraction to Water Resources. This information is included in the region's water assessment and planning process.

Power and Water have recently commissioned four bores in the Water Management Zone to the east of the Howard River, known as Howard East Stage 2.

There has been no increase in the annual licenced limit, however the additional bores will enable Power and Water to minimise the impact of its water extraction on rural residents, by shifting pumping focus away from the McMinns/Girraween area. The additional bores are essential to ensure that the greater Darwin region has sufficient short-term water supply in the event of a temporary loss of supply from Darwin River Dam.

### **What about Inpex**

Inpex is a customer of Power and Water and accesses water through Power and Water's reticulated water supply.

### **What about future development in the rural area**

Development decisions and broad scale planning are outside the responsibilities of the Water Resources Division. However, under the Planning Act the availability of groundwater is an assessment criteria that is considered by the Development Consent Authority (DCA) on the advice of the Water Resources Division to support any proposed development.

Where there is evidence that any new groundwater extraction will impact on existing water users or exceed what is considered sustainable for the underlying water resource, Water Resources will advise the DCA that it cannot grant a Bore Construction Permit.

This advice is factored into the decision by the DCA. It does not prevent future development or subdivision which can proceed with options such as reticulation or rainwater storage tanks.

The Berry Springs Water Allocation Plan also specifies that there will be no new bores granted in the Berry Springs Dolostone aquifer and there is an Interim Development Control Order in place for the area. Replacement of existing bores and bores constructed outside of the Berry Springs Dolostone aquifer will be granted.

### **How much water does an average household use**

Recent research undertaken by Living Water Smart indicates that average indoor use for a Darwin household is around 200KI per annum, while on average, an urban Darwin household uses around 600KI per annum, indicating around 400KI of water is used for the garden (or through leakage).

In its planning for residential use in the Darwin Rural Water Control District, Water Resources Division uses an average of 3.5ML per year, per stock and domestic user.

### **Why do I need a meter?**

The meter which is installed and remains the property of the licence holder is a requirement of the licence and will allow you to report your monthly usage to Water Resources. The meter is a helpful tool to help you manage your use more efficiently.

### **Why is the meter site a workplace?**

The meter site is defined as a workplace under the Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act. It is a place where a worker may go in the course of their work, albeit rarely, to inspect the meter.

It is important that owners of meters on private property take appropriate measures to ensure that hazards are minimised or eliminated for any worker that may attend to perform their work related duties.

### **Access for annual inspections**

As part of our compliance process Water Resources staff undertake an annual licence inspection of the meters to ensure it is in good working order. This inspection is always undertaken in consultation with the land owner and arranged at a mutually suitable time.

### **How long is a water licence issued for?**

Licences are generally issued for 10 years however in special circumstances licences can be issued for a longer term. On expiry of the licence, if the licence holder has complied with their existing licence conditions, the licence will be extended for a further term.

*For more information contact:*

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