

Guide to Waste Discharge Licences

What are Waste Discharge Licences?

Section 16 of the NT Water Act prohibits the pollution of water but allows for authorisation of waste discharge at Section 74 of the Act. This authorisation takes the form of a waste discharge licence. Waste discharge licences are regulatory instruments used to regulate the quality and quantity of wastewaters created by industrial and commercial operations that are then discharged to receiving waters¹ in the Northern Territory.

Licences can only be issued where beneficial uses or water quality objectives for the receiving waters have been declared by notification in the Gazette pursuant with Section 73 of the *Water Act*. Beneficial uses (or environmental values) include ecosystem protection, drinking water, recreation and cultural use, agricultural supply and industrial use. The preferred process for selection of the beneficial uses is via public stakeholder consultation in accordance with the [National Water Quality Management Strategy](#).

Licensing ensures that wastewater that has been generated by whatever process is subject to consideration for re-use, reduction in volume and/or pre-treatment and then allowed to discharge to the environment under conditions that have been established to ensure the zone of mixing and duration of the waste discharge are minimised. The possession of a current licence does not absolve the licensee of responsibility to minimise environmental detriment, but is clearly a defence from prosecution in the event of a pollution event.

When may a Waste Discharge Licence be needed?

A Waste Discharge Licence may be necessary if any of the following activities generate significant amounts of wastewater that are discharged into receiving waters.

- Mining
- Aquaculture
- Dredging
- Sewage effluent
- Marina discharges
- Manufacturing and industry
- Other wastewaters not disposed to sewer via a trade waste agreement with the service provider.

What is considered to be a waste²?

¹ Section 72 *Water Act 2001*, “water” means
(a) water flowing or contained in a waterway;
(b) ground water; or
(c) tidal water.

² Waste includes matter or a thing, whether wholly or partly in a solid, liquid or gaseous state, which, if added to water, may pollute the water. Pollute, in relation to water, means directly or indirectly to alter the physical, thermal, chemical, biological or

Wastewater may contain the following:

- Suspended Solids
- Nutrients
- Metals
- Micro-organisms
- Organic compounds such as pesticides
- Petroleum based compounds

What is contained in a Waste Discharge Licence?

The licence serves to provide information to the regulatory authority on the quality and quantity of the wastewater being discharged and its effect upon the receiving environment. Information that may be required in a licence includes:

- Development of Environmental Management Plans
- Water Management Plans
- Structured Monitoring programs including hydrological, physical, chemical and biological elements.
- Modelling scenarios
- Contingency reporting in the event of an environmental incident.

It is a requirement of all Waste Discharge Licensees to submit regular reports that collate the data collected through the monitoring programs instituted under the licence. These reports should be interpretative and summarise the results obtained.

How long is a Waste Discharge Licence valid for?

The period a licence is current varies but in most instances are valid for a maximum of two years. Licences can be of longer duration, subject to the Minister's discretion. All licences are reviewed for compliance with licence conditions. Licences are renewed where necessary to ensure continuity for on-going operations but otherwise lapse until a new licence is negotiated. For example, mining and dredging activities may respectively have a licence restricted to wet season discharges or only issued for the period of dredge operations.

How does a Waste Discharge Licence get issued?

Refer to the WDL [Flow Chart](#).

Where can I get an application form?

[Application Forms](#) can be downloaded from this site or from the Office listed in the contact information.

For more information regarding Waste Discharge Licences contact:

Environment, Heritage and the Arts Division
Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport
PO Box 496
PALMERSTON NT 0831

Ph. 08 8924 4139

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radioactive properties of the water so as to render it less fit for a prescribed beneficial use for which it is or may reasonably be used, or to cause a condition which is hazardous or potentially hazardous to -

- (a) public health, safety or welfare;
- (b) animals, birds, fish or aquatic life or other organisms; or
- (c) plants