



Beneficial Uses Declarations

Water is an essential part of our daily lives and nowhere more so than in the Northern Territory. From the deserts of the centre to the Top End tropics, water is used to sustain communities, industry, horticulture, agriculture, recreational activities and ecosystems.

Over the years, growing urbanisation, changing agricultural practices and industrial needs have increased the demand for fresh water and this has increased the pollution of water bodies. Water pollution has the potential to limit economic development by affecting drinking water supplies and impacting on rural living, fishing, aquatic systems, recreation and tourism.

As these activities increase, so does the potential for pollution to our water resources.

Beneficial Uses (water values) is a legislated process that assists in the protection and management of water resources. The community decides how a particular water body can be used by identifying what values they place on that water body.

NT Water Act 1992

The management and protection of the Northern Territory's water resources is controlled under the *Water Act 1992*. The *Water Act* legislates the extent to which both surface and ground water can be used and for what purpose. Waste discharge to natural waters is prohibited unless licensed under the Act. Waste Discharge Licences are only available in areas where Beneficial Uses have been declared.

BENEFICIAL USE CATEGORIES

- **Agriculture**
Provide irrigation water for primary production including related research
- **Aquaculture**
Provide water for commercial production of aquatic animals including related research
- **Public Water Supply**
Provide source water for drinking purposes delivered through community water supply systems
- **Environment**
Provide water to maintain the health of aquatic ecosystems
- **Cultural**
Provide water to meet aesthetic, recreational and cultural needs
- **Industry**
Provide water for industry, including secondary industry and a mining or petroleum activity, and other industry uses

- **Rural Stock and Domestic**

Public rights and ownership rights to take water for domestic and/or stock purposes

The Department works to the water quality guidelines and the Beneficial Use process set out in National Water Quality Management Strategy (NWQMS).

So where do we start?

To protect our water resources, the first step is to decide what the Beneficial Uses are for each natural water body in the Territory. Do we value the resource for drinking or recreation, for agricultural or industrial use, for protection of aquatic ecosystems, or for a combination of these uses?

Beneficial Uses are decided after consultation with the community. Once Beneficial Uses have been legislated, it is then possible to implement water allocation plans. These plans will ensure the future protection of the water body from a water use perspective.

How can I help?

Local communities, industry and government agencies can all play a part and work together in caring about water quality.

The Northern Territory Government will work with the community, industry and landholders to:

- Identify water resources under threat
- Determine Beneficial Uses/Environment Values of the water body
- Implement water quality management plans, Waste Discharge Licensing and monitoring programs
- Monitor the water body in question to ensure that pollution risks are minimised

As well as being involved in deciding what the water source should be used for, industry, landholders and community members can:

- Assist in establishing waste and land management plans to minimise the risk of pollution
- Apply for Waste Discharge Licences if actions are likely to affect the water quality
- Carry out monitoring, reporting and waste control as required under the conditions of a Waste Discharge Licence
- Seek opportunities for better waste management - reduce, reuse and recycle, rather than discharge
- Support local community groups involved in the protection of our water resources, such as Waterwatch, Bushcare and Landcare groups
- Participate in the consultation process which leads to the decision of Beneficial Uses
- Report pollution of water resources to the Pollution Response Hotline - Freecall 1800 064 567

For further information about Beneficial Uses Declarations, contact the Water Quality Officer on
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