



Water Allocation Planning - Ooloo Dolostone Aquifer

Water is one of the most fundamental and valued resources in the Northern Territory. It is vital for the wellbeing, prosperity and lifestyles enjoyed by many Territorians. It is also of critical importance to the health of the Northern Territory's pristine and delicate ecosystems. For these reasons, water allocation planning is crucial to ensure the sustainability of water resources.

The *NT Water Act* allows the enforceable allocation of water to various declared beneficial uses including; agriculture, aquaculture, public water supply, rural stock and domestic and industry while ensuring that adequate provisions are made to maintain cultural and environmental requirements. This is done through the declaration of water allocation plans within water control districts. Water Control districts are geographical areas declared under the *Water Act* by the relevant Northern Territory Government Minister to allow for intensive management of water resources.

What is a Water Allocation Plan?

A water allocation plan outlines how a particular water body (e.g. a river and/or an aquifer) is to be managed. They provide a blueprint for future sustainability by establishing a framework for sharing water between human and environmental needs. It sets limits to the availability of water assigned beneficial uses, rules for managing licences and water trading. A critical component of any water allocation plan is how it will be monitored to assess its performance and to inform mandatory reviews.

A Water Allocation Plan includes:

- the basis for water allocation planning and objectives for managing water in the plan area;
- limits to the availability of water;
- strategies that ensure the protection of environmental flows and other public benefit outcomes;
- rules for the assessment of licences to take water;
- rules for managing water licences in response to climate variability;
- rules for water trading; and
- monitoring programs to evaluate the performance of the plan and to inform its review.

When finalised, a water allocation plan has a maximum life of ten years and a maximum review period of five years. The review will draw on past experience and knowledge coupled with the outcomes of the monitoring program to establish how the plan may change and evolve to meet the needs of the future.

Water Allocation Planning for the Ooloo Aquifer

A Water Allocation Plan is now under development for the Ooloo aquifer. The Ooloo aquifer is the uppermost formation of the Daly groundwater basin and water from this aquifer flows into the Daly River, allowing it to flow all year round. The purpose of the Plan is to ensure water from the Ooloo aquifer can provide for sustainable agriculture and industry development without compromising the environmental

qualities that support the Daly's unique ecology, indigenous values and recreational opportunities.

The development of the Plan will be a transparent and stakeholder driven process designed to protect environmental and human interests. Licences issued under the Plan will be tradable and have a defined level of security for the life of the Plan. New licences to extract water will not be issued if they are deemed to have an unacceptable impact on other beneficial uses.

The Daly River Management Advisory Committee

The Daly River Management Advisory Committee (DRMAC) is an advisory body established by the Northern Territory government to develop options for the sustainable use and conservation of natural resources in the Daly River Catchment. DRMAC are the water advisory committee for the development of the Ooloo water allocation plan. DRMAC membership includes a range of stakeholders including horticulture, tourism, recreation, conservation and indigenous representatives with local knowledge and experience in the Daly region.

DRMAC will have access to the best available scientific information, allowing them to consider historical climate and recharge data and the environmental and cultural water requirements of the Daly River in determining a suitable extraction regime from the Ooloo aquifer for irrigated agriculture and other industries.

DRMAC are working with the Northern Territory Government to ensure key stakeholders and communities of the Daly region have opportunities to understand and contribute to the development of the Ooloo aquifer water allocation plan.

DRMAC will also work closely with the Daly River Aboriginal Reference Group to ensure that indigenous water use and development opportunities are recognised. Two members of the Daly River Aboriginal Reference Group are also members of DRMAC and ensure ongoing communication between these groups.

Community Consultation

The Northern Territory Government recognises that community values and beliefs are an integral component of the water allocation planning process. The local community have valuable knowledge to contribute and it is essential for government to understand the community's aspirations for the way their water is managed.

Information gathered and developed during the process is freely accessible and members of the public are encouraged to comment on the process and to make formal submissions before and after a draft plan is released. All submissions will be considered prior to the preparation of both the draft and final stages of the Ooloo water allocation plan.



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