



# Water Licence Security

## Water Allocation Plan for the Tindall Limestone Aquifer, Katherine

*This fact sheet contains information about water licence security categories and how they were assigned to groundwater extraction licences issued under the Water Allocation Plan for the Tindall Limestone Aquifer, Katherine.*

### Protecting our water supply

Each year, the amount of recharge to the Tindall Aquifer is determined based on recorded wet season rainfall. Some of the recharge is protected to provide environmental flows to the Katherine River with the remainder available for sharing between licence holders. In drier years, there may not be enough water in the aquifer to provide environmental flows as well as meet the full demand on water licences. When this happens, the volume of water that can be extracted under a licence may need to be reduced for that year.

### The introduction of water security

Prior to the declaration of the Water Allocation Plan for the Tindall Limestone Aquifer, Katherine, the security of water licences was not defined. This meant that licence holders were not able to assess the level of risk associated with their access to water.

Licence security is a new concept introduced in water allocation plan areas, which group and prioritise the various users, whereby one or more security categories are assigned to each licence. As water availability varies from year to year, so does the volume of water available under a licence. How often a licence holder can expect to access 100% of their licensed volume is based on which security category they fall into.

### About water licence security categories

Groundwater extraction licences are issued with a defined level of security, under the water allocation plan. There are four water licence security categories: Total, High, Medium and Low.

- Licence security categories prioritise how available water is assigned every year.
- By having different security categories, greater security can be provided to those with an established use or need.
- Licence securities categories (through the announced allocations process) allow us to take more water from the aquifer after a wet rainfall year with the ability to reduce water extraction following dry years.
- Various levels of security will help manage future sustainable development and growth in Katherine, whilst not impacting on the security of established water users.

### How do they work?

Understanding how licence securities work will help land holders to manage and make decisions about water use for existing and future development.

When reductions need to be made, they are applied in the following order:

1. low security licence holders are reduced first;
2. then medium security licences may be reduced, after low are reduced to 0% allocation;
3. then high security licences may be reduced, after low and medium security licences have been reduced to 0% allocation.

## How are licences prioritised?

Different categories of water licences receive different levels of water security. For example, a high security licence has a higher chance of receiving a water allocation than a low security licence.

Water Users	Security description
Public water supply services	<b>Total security</b> - <i>Priority over all other users</i>
Stock and domestic (unlicensed)	Exempt from licensing under the Water Act - <i>Priority over all other users</i>
Existing development at 2003	<b>High security</b> – <i>Priority over medium and low security licences.</i> Reductions only occur once medium and low entitlements are reduced to 0%.
Proposed development at 2003 on already developed properties	<b>Medium security</b> – <i>Priority over low security licences</i> Reductions occur after low entitlements are reduced to 0%
Properties that commenced development after 2003	<b>Low security</b> Most likely to receive a reduction in allocation, in years of below average recharge.

## What's the reliability of each licence security category?

The amount of water that will be available each year in the future is unknown. The best indication of how licences in each security category are likely to perform in the future is to look at how they would have performed in the past, using historical climate data.

The water allocation plan presents reliability based on the longest period of rainfall and recharge data available (1961–2007). During this timeframe high security licence holders would have received their full licence volume in about 7 out of every 10 years. However in the period of record from 1961–1975, high security licence holders would have received their full licence volume in only 3 out of 10 years, however in period from 1996–2007, a much greater level of reliability would have been achieved.

The following figures are based on a full development scenario showing wet, dry and very dry climatic conditions. Any future development needs to take into account the risk if current wet conditions revert back to drier periods.

Period of Record	Climatic Conditions	Total Security	High Security	Medium Security	Low Security
1961 - 2007	Variable	100%	72%	28%	14%
1961 - 1975	Very Dry	100%	30%	0%	0%
1975 - 2007	Dry	100%	86%	36%	17%
1996 - 2007	Wet	100%	86%	73%	60%

More information about licence securities is included in the Water Allocation Plan for the Tindall Limestone Aquifer, Katherine, and Background document which can be viewed online.

### Further Information:

#### **Water Resources Division**

Department of Natural Resources,  
Environment, the Arts and Sport

Ph: (08) 8973 8840

Fax: (08) 8973 8894

Email: [water.nretas@nt.gov.au](mailto:water.nretas@nt.gov.au)

Web: <http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/water/manage>