

Ceasing supplies to regulated rivers—options and assistance for water users

Since 2017, large parts of northern inland NSW have seen record or near-record low inflows to rivers. Water storages in many of these river systems have fallen to critically low levels.

Some regulated rivers that typically receive a constant flow from dam releases are running dry and must rely on rainfall to restart flows. Others can only sustain intermittent releases.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to describe the water supply options available for users reliant on NSW regulated rivers when supplies become unavailable because of the drought.

You can get status updates of critical drought-affected valleys in NSW on the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment website at - www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/update/critical-valleys-in-drought

If you rely on any of the affected rivers for water, you may need to make alternative arrangements to access supplies. This can take time, particularly if you need to purchase groundwater entitlements and/or get approval to drill a bore.

We advise affected water users to immediately investigate their options and prepare to take action, including reducing their operations and livestock, if there is no viable alternative water supply.

Alternative water supply options

Water carting

You can have small volumes of water, particularly for domestic and stock purposes, carted in. Many local councils provide stand pipes or filling stations to supply water for rural landholders and you can hire local water carters to truck the water to the destination.

It is also possible to cart larger quantities of water for commercial or more intensive industries, but the number of truck movements and costs need to be considered.

Contact your local council and/or water carting companies for advice on locations and costs.

Groundwater bores

The requirements for accessing groundwater depend on the intended use of that water. It is simpler to apply for basic landholder rights (household domestic and non-intensive livestock needs) than for commercial uses because an access licence is not required for basic rights.

If you do not have an existing bore, you will need to get an approval to drill one. Once the approval is granted, you must use a licensed driller to construct the bore. The driller must have the appropriate class of drillers licence for the type of water supply bore you need.

We recommend you arrange a pre-application meeting with a Water Regulation Officer from WaterNSW to discuss the proposed activity, likely impacts, the application process and the information required. The pre-application meeting is a free service. To arrange a meeting, contact the Customer Helpdesk on 1300 662 077 or email Customer.Helpdesk@waternsw.com.au

New bores for domestic and stock supply

While an access licence is not required to supply basic landholder rights, you need a work approval to drill a bore.

Application forms and information on domestic and stock bores are available from the WaterNSW website at - www.waternsw.com.au/customer-service/water-licensing/basic-water-rights/domestic-and-stock-rights

New bores for commercial supplies or trading

The process to get approval for a commercial bore can take a number of months to complete. It is designed to ensure that other users and the environment are not unduly impacted.

No new groundwater entitlements for commercial purposes are being issued¹. To obtain groundwater entitlement for commercial purposes you will need to purchase the entitlement from another licence holder in the same groundwater system underlying your property.

Alternatively, if you only want to obtain groundwater for a temporary period (up to a year), you can purchase a groundwater allocation from a nearby licence holder. These applications for temporary trades take two to three weeks to process—the pumping impacts on neighbouring bores are assessed.

Water brokers can assist with the process of purchasing groundwater entitlements or allocations, providing there is water available on the market.

Application forms for temporary and permanent trades are available from WaterNSW's website at – www.waternsw.com.au/customer-service/water-licensing/dealings-and-trade

Transporting groundwater from a neighbour

Some groundwater licence holders do not use all of their allocation. You may be able to come to a private arrangement with a neighbour to purchase some or all of their groundwater allocation and pipe/truck it to your property.

This gets around the need to get approval to sink a bore on your property. However, you may still require approval for works (pipes) to transfer the water.

Information on water supply work and use approvals is available from WaterNSW's website at - www.waternsw.com.au/customer-service/water-licensing/approvals/water-supply-work-and-use-approvals



Figure 1. Licensed groundwater drillers sinking a bore.

¹ The only exception is where the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has announced a controlled allocation. This is where limited volumes of entitlement are offered for sale in some aquifers (mostly porous or fractured rock aquifers) that are not fully allocated. The next controlled allocation is scheduled for October 2019.

Available financial assistance

There is a range of government financial assistance available to assist primary producers, subject to eligibility criteria.

Visit the NSW Drought Hub for information on NSW Government and Australian Government assistance and eligibility - www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/droughthub/drought-assistance

You can also contact the Rural Assistance Authority on 1800 678 593.

Drought Transport Subsidy

The NSW Government is providing a subsidy of up to \$40,000 over 18 months for the cost of transporting fodder, water and stock.

Animal Welfare Transport Subsidy

The NSW Government is providing a subsidy of 50% of the costs to a maximum payment of \$20,000 for the permanent transfer of stock off a farm that is facing financial hardship and poor stock health.

Drought Assistance Fund

The NSW Government is providing a \$50,000 interest free loan to transport stock, fodder and water, genetic banking of breeding herds and to install on-farm fodder and water infrastructure. The loan term is seven years, with no repayments in the first two years.

Farm Innovation Fund

The NSW Government is offering loans up to \$1 million for infrastructure works such as sheds, silos, water storage to prepare for dry conditions and improve on-farm efficiency.

Regional Investment Corporation Low Interest Loans

The Australian Government is offering low interest loans to help farmers prepare for, manage through, and recover from drought.

On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate

The Australian and NSW Governments are offering a 25% rebate for urgently needed on-farm water infrastructure for animal welfare needs such as installation of pipes, water storages and water pumps, de-silting dams, and associated power supplies such as generators. The maximum amount that can be claimed is \$25,000.

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