

Transparency Measures

1. What information should be available on the public register and why?

- The information currently available on the Water Register and the WAL register in respect of privately held water rights and conditions is sufficient. The public currently has access to information regarding licenses, approvals and allocation and entitlement trading.
- The current on-line system is clunky and not easy to use. Improvements in usability are warranted. These are improvements to the way in which the information is accessed, not changes to what information is accessed.
- The WAL Register already provides information on ownership of water access licenses. This is sufficient. The fee for service required to access these details is consistent in principle with other government business registers. e.g. accessing detailed information on companies through the Australian Securities and Investments Corporation registers requires a fee.
- The NSW Environmental Water Register is an uninspiring website. This water is public water and if a concerted effort is to be made to inform the public about water holdings, this is where such effort should first focus. Those familiar with water issues can find their way around the data. The general public would have difficulty ascertaining where the water access is held and under what conditions it can be accessed.
- Water meter readings should not be published for the following reasons;
 - Meter readings are for the water user and the water authorities to monitor usage and to charge appropriate fees in accordance with such usage.
 - Private meter readings for other utilities, electrical energy meters, municipal water meters, and gas meters are not published. To publish bulk water meter readings would be inequitable and discriminatory.
- Water account balances should not be published for the following reasons;
 - Water accounts, under continuous accounting or allocation accounts hold information that is private and market sensitive. In that way, water accounts are similar to private bank accounts. To propose that private bank account balances and transactions should be made public is unsound and would not be tolerated.
 - Trading in commodities revolves around willing participants acting on price to satisfy their requirements, whether that be stock in trade or speculative participation. To publish water account balances would leave the market open to manipulation and coercion. e.g. Water market traders being able to see a irrigator's account balance and also knowing the cropping program of the user could lead to an unfair advantage in trade negotiations.

- The current Water Register water trading information, supplemented by available water broker information, provides sufficient public transparency.
 - Aggregated level account balances and meter reading published at the end of the water year would overcome most commercially sensitive risks.
- Increased confidence in the community that the water management framework is being complied with comes from active and efficient government agencies, not from publishing private water account information.
 - It would make good sense that the current range of water registers used by various authorities were analysed and compared, the good features coagulated into a better style of register that would provide everyone with better information. e.g. web mapping tools combined with advanced graphics could be used to make a live display of current access along streams to flows (regulated releases, unregulated triggers, supplementary access)
 - Such Information Technology improvement do not require legislation, it simply requires authorities to address their Information Technology capabilities in much the same way the Bureau of Meteorology has recently done.

2. How to improve information about when water can be taken

- Water access rules and conditions are complex and vary over geography and time, often overlapping across various water classes. Such complexity requires an ongoing combination of information provision. No one information source can be workable, it needs to be multi-faceted.
- Dedicated web pages are fine where internet access is adequate. That rules out much of rural and regional NSW (and Australia) where internet access is useless or non-existent. In these areas many water users operate and community interest is often high.
- A combination of information sources should be maintained;
 - A well thought out and functional web site, with advanced graphics
 - An automated telephone service, much like those used by some airlines for flight updates
 - A manned telephone service with someone who actually knows what's going on at the end
 - Refining and improving the current information flow from regional water offices to local water users on flow events and access. This works well but can be modernised. Interested members of the public could also subscribe to this information flow.
 - The problem of providing information in remote locations is not new. There are many examples in rural and regional Australia where information on road conditions, flooding, bushfires and other notifications are shared with the public. An audit and analysis of such methods may provide additional alternative solutions.