

Frequently asked questions about the Water Sharing Plan for the Great Artesian Basin Groundwater Sources

What is a water sharing plan?

Water sharing plans are statutory plans made under the NSW *Water Management Act 2000*. The rules in the plans allow equitable sharing of water for all water uses, including the environment. The plans have a statutory timeframe of 10 years. The purpose of a water sharing plan is to:

- give water users a clear picture of when and how water will be available for extraction
- protect the fundamental environmental health of the water source
- ensure our water sources are sustainably managed in the long-term.

The plans clearly define the rules for sharing in the available water in a water source. They also provide irrigators and farmers with continuing or 'perpetual' licences, which have a title separate from the land, enabling better water trading opportunities. The plan also sets out requirements for basic landholder rights – stock and domestic rights, harvestable rights and Native Title rights.

Water sharing plans support the long-term health of rivers and aquifers by making water available specifically for the environment.

Why are water sharing plans reviewed?

NSW water sharing plans are valid for 10 years from their starting date. Following a review by the independent Natural Resources Commission, the Minister may extend or replace a water sharing plan under the *Water Management Act 2000*. The Natural Resources Commission's formal review of a plan identifies opportunities to deliver better outcomes for all water users, including the environment.

The *Water Sharing Plan for the NSW Great Artesian Basin Groundwater Sources 2008* is being replaced. The replacement plan will be known as the *Water Sharing Plan for the NSW Great Artesian Basin Groundwater Sources 2020*.

How are stakeholders consulted about the replacement water sharing plan?

Stakeholder input is critical to the development of water sharing plans in NSW. We are consulting the community through:

- public information and consultation sessions
- an advisory group specific to the Great Artesian Basin
- inter-agency consultation.

The replacement plan will be on public exhibition for forty days. You can have your say by attending the public meetings and completing a submission form that's available on the website of the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

How will groundwater-dependent ecosystems be managed?

Groundwater dependent ecosystems rely on groundwater to meet their water needs. The groundwater helps maintain plant and animal communities and ecological processes. The water sharing plan for the Great Artesian Basin includes a schedule that identifies high-priority

groundwater-dependent ecosystems (springs) and a map that identifies other potential high-priority, groundwater-dependent ecosystems (vegetation communities). The draft plan includes rules for protecting these, such as prohibiting the new bores or increased authorised extraction within specified distances of the ecosystems.

More information on the identification and protection of groundwater-dependent ecosystems in the Great Artesian Basin is in the fact sheet *Groundwater-dependent ecosystems: Identifying and protecting groundwater-dependent ecosystems in the GAB* available here:

www.industry.nsw.gov.au/gab-groundwater-water-sources-components-for-consultation

Are there changes to where I can locate a new bore?

Yes, the department proposes to standardise distance rules, where appropriate, in all water sharing plans.

We are proposing changes to distance rules to minimise interference between users, contaminated sources, groundwater-dependent ecosystems and groundwater-dependent culturally significant sites. The proposed changes to these rules are summarised in the fact sheet *Replacement of the NSW Great Artesian Basin Water Sharing Plan—proposed changes*, available at:

www.industry.nsw.gov.au/gab-groundwater-water-sources-components-for-consultation

How does the department assess the groundwater impacts of dealing (trade) applications?

The potential impacts of groundwater extraction are managed through an assessment process. This process is used for all applications for all groundwater dealings (trade) and water supply works approvals (extractive works such as bores). These applications are received by either WaterNSW or the Natural Resources Access Regulator and then, if required, referred to the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment—Water for hydrogeological assessment.

The fact sheet *Assessing groundwater applications* provides details on the groundwater impact assessment criteria to be applied across the state. It does not propose any significant changes to the existing impact assessment criteria. You can see it at:

www.industry.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/175931/Assessing-groundwater-applications-fact-sheet.pdf

Has the department revised estimated requirements for water in the NSW Great Artesian Basin groundwater sources?

Yes, the department has updated estimates in the Great Artesian Basin Water Sharing Plan for planned environmental water and the long-term average annual extraction limits for the Eastern Recharge, Southern Recharge, Surat, Warrego and Central groundwater sources. We have done this to incorporate new knowledge and updated information.

More information about this is in the fact sheet *Eastern Recharge and Southern Recharge Groundwater Sources: Long-term average annual extraction limits and planned environmental water* or the fact sheet *Surat, Warrego and Central Groundwater Sources: Long-term average annual extraction limits and planned environmental water* both available at:

www.industry.nsw.gov.au/gab-groundwater-water-sources-components-for-consultation

Has the department revised the method used to estimate requirements for basic landholder rights in the NSW Great Artesian Basin groundwater sources?

Yes, the department has reviewed the method for estimating the basic landholder rights (domestic and stock rights) requirements to inform the figures in the replacement plan.

The revised method for estimating basic landholder rights is a combination of the department's current basic landholder rights estimation method and that used in the Queensland portion of the Great Artesian Basin. The revised method also discounts the take of water from overlying groundwater sources and watercourses in the estimation of basic landholder rights.

More information about this is in the factsheet *Replacement of the NSW Great Artesian Basin water sharing plan—proposed changes*, available at: www.industry.nsw.gov.au/gab-groundwater-water-sources-components-for-consultation

Are there any proposed changes to the water sharing plan rules that may affect me?

Yes, although it will depend on your specific circumstances. The proposed changes to the water sharing plan include:

- the addition of potential high-priority groundwater-dependent ecosystems (vegetation communities) identified on the High-priority Groundwater-dependent Ecosystem Map for the Great Artesian Basin Water Sharing Plan
- new setback rules for water supply works located near potential high-priority groundwater-dependent ecosystems (vegetation communities)
- new rules for water supply works located near groundwater-dependent, culturally significant areas
- additional rules to reduce risks to groundwater from contamination sources
- additional setback rules for water supply works to minimise the impacts between users
- additional mandatory conditions to reduce the volume of water flowing from artesian free-flowing bores.

More information

The draft NSW Great Artesian Basin Water Sharing Plan 2020 and other fact sheets are available from www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/water-sharing-plans/water-sharing-plans-on-public-exhibition/gab