

Update March 2004

Introduction.

The time frame for the decision on the application from the Water Corporation to take 45 GL/yr from the South West Yarragadee is under review. The decision to revise the timeframe recognises the need for further investigation of the ecology, hydrology and hydrogeology in specific locations within the study area and that the time frame must now be determined on the basis that the required work satisfies the requirements to be set by the Water and Rivers Commission.

The requirements are currently being developed and include the criteria presented in the multi-criteria assessment matrix after having taken community comment on that matrix into account. The Commission is currently liaising with the Corporation on the work required to fulfil the requirements. The Corporation will then make a decision on what work it proposes to undertake.

The revised approach is now likely to involve a change in the management arrangements for the project with the Water Corporation taking responsibility for undertaking more detailed investigations to demonstrate to the Commission that 45 GL/yr may be drawn from the South West Yarragadee within the criteria being set by the Commission.

The Commission will still manage all aspects of investigation and communication in relation to the development of a management plan for the Blackwood Groundwater area.

Discussion.

Results from the first runs of the regional model have highlighted local areas that require further investigation before the full extent of water availability from the South West Yarragadee aquifer can be determined. The coarseness of the regional modelling in these areas cannot be refined without further on-ground investigation on the relevant factors to provide information at the local scale.

Further work has been identified as being required to better understand the nature of the following ecosystems and the nature of their relationship and dependence on groundwater:

- Blackwood River;
- Blackwood tributaries;
- Paleo-channel wetlands;
- Scott Coastal plain wetlands; and
- Reedia swamps.

Further work on understanding the potential for interaction with the acid sulphate soils on the Scott Coastal plain may also be needed.

The Water Corporation is currently considering what investigation programs will be needed to satisfy these needs and will be discussing them with the Commission to ensure the programs are designed to provide information to satisfy Commission requirements.

The Water and Rivers Commission now has two principal responsibilities in managing this process.

1. The completion of the management plan for the Blackwood Groundwater area; and
2. Ensure that the work undertaken by the Water Corporation satisfies the criteria being set by the Commission.

While it is clear that negotiations must continue in light of the new potential roles and responsibilities, it is appreciated that the commitment for both accountable and responsible decision-making must be maintained. The Water and Rivers Commission is currently determining its approach to ensure that individuals and organisations who have been involved in this project, continue to be informed as to project progress and outcomes.

WHAT TO EXPECT.

During the week beginning March 15th, an update will outline the information required from the Water Corporation to allow the Commission to further consider the Corporation licence application.

The detailed information requirements and basis of the licence assessment, including all the specific criteria to be met will be finalised by March 26th. This information will be communicated to the Water Corporation and will be made available to the public shortly after.

In the meantime, the extensive amount of information that has been obtained during the project to date will continue to be analysed and assessed by the Commission. Any conclusions that can be drawn from this work will be made public as soon as available.

For further information please contact:

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