



Plan for the Management of Water Resources

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What is a Water Management Plan?

A Water Management Plan is a statutory document that guides water management in a particular area. A Plan contains information that allows informed decisions to be made by both the Water and Rivers Commission and the community regarding access and use of the identified water resources. The Plan is owned by the community to which it relates and considered as a document that will guide the sustainable use of their water resources well into the future.

A Plan is an agreement between Government and the community on how the groundwater resources will be used during the period of the Plan. It sets benchmarks against which people can monitor resources behaviour and provides the means to make adaptive changes over time. It also provides the rules and regulations that all licensed water users must abide by to ensure the groundwater resources are used in a sustainable, fair and equitable way.

Why do we need a Water Management Plan?

Groundwater resources are complex systems, which must be managed by making sense of a limited set of data. Although licensing is the prime statutory tool that is used by the Commission to manage water allocation and use, a Plan is the tool that brings together the social, cultural, economic and environmental aspects of groundwater management. All this information is required to ensure that while the groundwater is used for the social and economic benefit of the community, the natural environment is also protected. A Plan balances the needs of modern society with the needs of the environment.

What are the benefits of a Water Management Plan?

The process of preparing a Plan identifies the priority issues and allows the community to have a say in how their groundwater resources are managed. A Plan allows the Commission to adapt its management response to the way the resource responds to pumping, climate change and land use. It provides security and confidence in business investment decisions knowing that the rules will not change without water user input.

The role of the Water and Rivers Commission in the Water Management Plan

The Commission's role is to administer the provisions of the Rights in Water and Irrigation Act (RiWIA) and to manage the water to achieve the Plan's objectives. The Act gives the Commission broad authority over water concerns. The Commission will also facilitate the community consultation, particularly during the development and review of the Plan. The Commission is the final decision-maker following community consultation on the many issues related to the access and use of water and will have certain responsibilities under the Plan.

The role of the community in the Water Management Plan

The community's role is to assist the Commission in its decision-making, and to use the groundwater resource in accordance with the provisions in the Plan.

The planning process and the Blackwood Plan

Planning, by its nature, is a continuous process, adapting to new conditions and information. It is proposed to implement the Blackwood Plan on October 1, 2004 for four years. It will be

reviewed in 2008 and consideration given as to what action will be taken in accordance with the Act. This does not preclude making amendments to the operating rules within the planning cycle; however, care must be taken to ensure that such changes are made in consultation with the community. Major changes to the operating rules can therefore be implemented at the beginning of the next planning cycle. The planning cycle is defined in the Act and can be divided into three major components - preparation, approval and review.

Preparation

The preparation of a Plan involves the most work. It includes the collection and collation of data and information, developing objectives, generating and evaluating options, identifying preferred options with community consensus, and writing the first draft. The first draft Plan is currently being developed by the Commission in cooperation with the Whicher Water Resource Management Committee, community members and other stakeholders. **THIS IS THE STAGE WE ARE IN NOW.**

Approval

Once the draft Plan is prepared, it is available for public consultation and submissions for two months. On the basis of public submissions, modifications are made to the Plan. Once the modifications have been incorporated, the Plan, a summary of the public submissions, and a Commission report indicating its view of the merits of the submissions and requests, are submitted to the Minister for the Environment. The Minister may approve the Plan or direct further modifications to be made before publication in the *Government Gazette*. The date of publication in the *Gazette* is the implementation date of the final Plan.

Review

The Act requires a Plan to be reviewed within seven years of its implementation. In other States, Plans are reviewed every 10 years. This shorter time frame in WA is beneficial for initial plans as it reduces the period for review to enable early detection and correction of unsustainable practices and trends. The Blackwood Plan will be reviewed in four years to ensure that if something was overlooked, it will be picked up in time. This short planning period and adaptive approach will allow management changes to be made if the need arises. The revised Plan will be again available for public comment and any amendments submitted to the Minister for approval.

Process to bring data together in the Plan

1. Identification of community issues and concerns
2. Hydrogeological, social, cultural and economic investigations and studies to answer issues and concerns
3. Set principles and objectives to underpin sustainable water allocation
4. Use the outcomes of investigations to develop planning scenarios
5. Determine the social, cultural, environmental and economic impacts by modelling different volumes from different locations
6. Use this information to determine the sustainable yields of the aquifer systems
7. Develop the rules for water management
8. Allocate the water in accordance with the rules

The planning process

- Minister directs Commission to prepare a plan (done)
- Preparation of Plan with community involvement
- Public notification of plan/submission to other bodies
- Public submissions received
- Modifications made and final draft prepared
- Approval by Water and Rivers Commission Board
- Submission to Minister
- Ministerial approval
- Ministerial approval published in Gazette
- Plan implemented

- Review Blackwood Plan in four years

General approval process for large scale licence applications

Outlined in the table below is some information on the types of investigations that are currently being undertaken to meet the requirements of the Act

Schedule 1	Relevant considerations	Assessment
Clause	Whether the proposed taking and use of water...	
7(2)(a)	are in the public interest - contribution to the local, regional and State economic, cultural and social objectives	social, cultural and economic investigations; issues paper
7(2)(b)	are ecologically sustainable - to protect water dependent ecosystems	EWR investigation; modelling
7(2)(c)	are environmentally acceptable - balancing the social, cultural, economic and ecological values	setting critical water levels and modelling the impacts
7(2)(d)	may prejudice other current and future needs for water - all reasonable regional needs, including population growth, agriculture and industry, be considered	from economic investigations
7(2)(e)	Would, in the opinion of the Commission, have a detrimental effect on another person - impacts on local water users, bores, inter-generational equity and cultural values	Existing users are recognised and protected from unreasonable impact
7(2)(f)	Could be provided for by another source - option analysis	To be considered in the feasibility studies
7(2)(g)	Are in keeping with: (i) local practices; (ii) a relevant local by-law; (iii) a plan approved under Part III; or (iv) relevant previous decisions by the Commission.	