# Understanding groundwater in the Smithton area

**FACT SHEET**

Groundwater is an important natural resource providing a reliable, sustainable source of water for drinking, irrigation, agriculture, and industrial use across many areas of Tasmania. It also plays an important role in our environment supporting rivers, lakes and wetlands and can be essential to the health of water dependent ecosystems.

Tasmania has complex groundwater systems and understanding the linkages between surface water and groundwater is essential to improving our knowledge of risks and opportunities for groundwater use. This helps us to manage them in a more integrated and sustainable way.

Due to the interconnected nature of streams and rivers with groundwater systems in much of Tasmania, overuse of groundwater can adversely impact water supply to existing water users and the environment. This can either be directly by lowering groundwater levels, potentially reducing the reliability and security of water for other groundwater users, or indirectly by reducing groundwater flows to rivers, impacting on the amount of water in the river system.

Better understanding our groundwater systems is important to support sustainable and reliable access to freshwater into the future and protect the environment.

## The what

The Tasmanian Government is investing in projects to gain a better understanding of our groundwater resource so we can sustainably manage the resource into the future. The Tasmanian Groundwater Assessment Project is being undertaken through the Government's Rural Water Use Strategy to improve our understanding of the State's groundwater resources, including interactions between groundwater and surface water, which will help us to manage water in a sustainable way.

The Groundwater Assessment Project is jointly funded by the Tasmanian Government and the Australian Government through the National Water Grid Authority.

## The why

Groundwater usage in the Smithton area is increasing and represents an important resource for many farmers in the area, especially as a source of water for the dairy industry. One of the key gaps in our knowledge is understanding the status of existing bores as well as estimating how much groundwater is being used and its relationship to the amount of water entering the system. This information will help to assess whether more active management of groundwater is required in the future to ensure a sustainable supply for those that rely on it. To understand groundwater use we need to verify and update information about existing bores such as location and operational status.

## How can you help?

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania staff will be visiting the Smithton area to conduct surveys of groundwater users and bores to better understand groundwater use and confirm bore locations and details in the area. Information on their operational status, the purpose for what groundwater is used, the quantity of groundwater taken, groundwater level and the capacity of any equipment used to take groundwater is the key focus of the surveys.

## The when

Surveys will begin in October 2024 and will be conducted over the next 18 months. Communication with groundwater users will occur via phone calls, email, mail and site visits.

If you would like to participate, please contact the Department's Water Management and Assessment Branch by email at Water.Enquiries@nre.tas.gov.au or by phone 1300 368 550. The success of the study is dependent on the participation of existing groundwater users.

## Did you know?

Access to groundwater is available as a right under the *Water Management Act 1999* for both stock and domestic use, and for commercial uses like irrigation and dairy wash-down. Groundwater is available for these uses but without information on how much is currently used it is not possible to judge if usage and recharge (groundwater replenishment) are appropriately in balance.

The *Water Management Regulations 2019* require groundwater users to keep records for 5 years after taking the groundwater from the well. Records should include:

- the operational status of their bores/wells.
- the purpose for what groundwater is used.
- the quantity of groundwater taken.
- the capacity of any equipment used to take groundwater.

## Learn more (relevant websites):

NRE Tas 'Water' web page - https://nre.tas.gov.au/water

Rural Water Use Strategy - https://nre.tas.gov.au/water/water-legislation-policies-and-strategies/rural-water-use-strategy

Tasmanian Groundwater Assessment Project - https://nre.tas.gov.au/water/water-legislation-policies-and-strategies/rural-water-use-strategy/activities-underway/groundwater-assessment

NRE Tas Groundwater website - https://nre.tas.gov.au/water/groundwater