



# Water Accountability Project

Fact Sheet August 2024

## What is water accountability?

Water accountability underpins effective management of water resources.

Water accountability is the recording, reporting, and accounting of water use in a system. Essentially, it aims to answer the key questions: who is using water, when is water being used, how much water is being used, where is it being used and for what purpose?

Water accountability underpins effective management of water resources and is required at the system and individual level to provide credible information that allows for evidence-based decision-making to underpin the sustainable management of water resources.

At the system level, water use accountability and water accounting provides information to support assessments of demand and supply and water allocation decisions. It is also required for sustainable resource planning and management.

The management of individual site level water use ensures transparency and confidence that water users are operating in a manner that is consistent with their rights and obligations. There are also significant gains for water users to understand their own water use and opportunities to improve efficiency.

- Water accountability is part of a broader suite of water management tools in Tasmania.
- The current framework has served Tasmania well but requires modernising to meet challenges from a changing climate, population growth, growing complexity in water management arrangements and more demands on our water resource.
- Continued confidence and certainty about availability and reliability of water allocations is required.
- Accurate water use data capture that aligns with contemporary and national best practice is recommended.
- A risk-based approach to implementation will be adopted meaning different water accountability measures will be required in different catchments based on risk.
- Opportunities for engagement with water managers and water users will be a key focus during implementation.
- Implementation will be staged over a number of years to allow people to have a say and time to adapt.

## What are the changes being considered?

### Updates are needed for a fit-for-purpose water accountability framework for Tasmania.

The Water Accountability Review, delivered during 2023 through the Rural Water Use Strategy, found that Tasmania's water accountability framework has historically served water management needs well but requires modernising to meet challenges from a changing climate, population growth, growing complexity in water management arrangements and more demands on our water resource.

The review made 23 recommendations for updates to Tasmania's water accountability policies and regulatory systems covering updated risk-based water meter and reporting requirements, improving water manager coordination, updates to the compliance and enforcement framework and increased public reporting of water meter progress and compliance. 11 of these recommendations have already commenced in conjunction with projects being delivered under the Rural Water Use Strategy.

The review outlined that the lessons from other jurisdictions show that it is much simpler and less costly for Government to implement sustainable water management practices before resources become overallocated. The review noted that, given its current level of allocation, Tasmania is well placed to pursue improvements to minimise the long-term social and economic implications of implementing enhanced water accountability measures.

Enhancing water security including through water accountability measures is also a key national water reform priority, with all States and Territories working to improve metering and reporting.

## Why is it important to make these changes?

### Tasmania is facing increasing pressure on its water resources.

Some key trends include:

- In Tasmania, climate change is causing significant change in rainfall patterns, more hot days and heatwaves, an increase in storms and rise in annual average temperatures. This is changing the timing and reliability of water availability as well as demands on our precious water resources.
- Across Tasmania, most catchments are fully developed in summer and many catchments are also fully developed in winter or are approaching full allocation and there is increasing development and use of existing water entitlements.
- There has been significant and ongoing growth in irrigation water infrastructure development and uptake, and growing complexity of water management and delivery within our catchments.
- There has been growth in urban water requirements. Climate change, population growth and seasonal pressures such as seasonal tourist booms is anticipated to result in additional future growth in some areas.
- Business confidence and water security for farm businesses and other water-dependent industries will increasingly depend on effective and transparent water management arrangements, systems and information.



Effective reporting of water use, and risk based informed metering will better support effective management of water systems and reduce the risk of overuse or illegal take and third-party impacts or impacts to the environment.

Enhanced water accountability will also provide improved information for decision-making (including water planning and allocation decisions) and underpin community confidence in sustainable long-term water resource management interventions.

## How will stakeholders have a say?

### Our stakeholders are important.

Our engagement approach will be tailored to the needs of stakeholders and the public. NRE Tas will engage regularly with key water managers and peak industry groups through a stakeholder working group convened for the project. Consultative reference groups will also be convened from time to time to workshop elements of revised policy and regulatory settings and provide feedback. There will also be opportunities for public comment on the draft revised water accountability framework policy.

Stakeholder views and feedback will be sought at regular intervals particularly through the Rural Water Roundtable to assess whether stakeholder engagement methods are effective or need adapting to meet new challenges or respond to emerging issues.

## What are our timeframes?

The Water Accountability Project will be staged over the next 2 years to ensure comprehensive stakeholder engagement and the opportunity for feedback and to give stakeholders and the industry sector time to adapt and learn about what the changes will mean for them.



# FAQ'S

QUESTION	ANSWER
<p>Why did NRE Tas commission the Water Accountability Review?</p>	<p>An action within the <i>Rural Water Use Strategy</i> is to review Tasmania's water accountability and reporting frameworks to strengthen water use and water conveyance measurement and reporting to provide transparency, security, and investor certainty. The <i>Water Accountability Review</i> was commissioned to inform this action and to propose improvements to the existing framework.</p>
<p>What did the review say about our current water accountability framework?</p>	<p>The review of Tasmania's water accountability framework found that it has historically served Tasmania's water management needs, particularly in relatively low-risk, low competition settings. However, the framework is almost a decade into its implementation, in which time the challenges and opportunities for water security have evolved. Water management arrangements are also growing in complexity, with multiple water managers providing access to different water products with minimal sharing of water management data across water management entities.</p>
<p>What did the review recommend for a future water accountability framework?</p>	<p>The review made 23 recommendations for changes to the framework to achieve improved outcomes such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water accountability arrangements are aligned with national arrangements and are clear and equitable and applied consistently across water managers.</li> <li>• Water accountability requirements and implementation are prioritised based on risks to water resources including environmental, economic and cultural.</li> <li>• There is credible, reliable, and accurate water use information at the individual and catchment level to inform evidence-based decisions by water users and water resource managers.</li> <li>• There is transparency and confidence that water use complies with individual allocations and conditions and catchment level limits, and that water resource managers are managing water resources sustainably and equitably.</li> <li>• Confidence and certainty about the availability and reliability of water allocations, which supports individual business management, planning and investment as well as the sustainable development of water resources.</li> <li>• Water sharing and accounting across different water products and shared responsibility for water management.</li> </ul>
<p>Are catchments in Tasmania overallocated?</p>	<p>No, there are no catchments in Tasmania that are overallocated. This review will help NRE Tas ensure our framework remains current and is fit for purpose, to ensure we continue to manage our catchment allocations effectively and to National best practice standards.</p>



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Why is a catchment risk assessment required?	<p>There is a need to develop a catchment risk assessment framework that can directly inform development and implementation of a contemporary and fit-for-purpose water accountability framework for Tasmania including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informing water use metering and reporting requirements, priorities, or exemptions; and</li> <li>• Compliance and enforcement activity planning and prioritisation.</li> </ul>
What are the positives from developing and applying a contemporary catchment risk assessment framework?	<p>Positives from developing and applying a contemporary catchment risk assessment framework to support water management policies in Tasmania include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved basis for setting priorities and timeframes for strengthened water accountability requirements, for example, prioritising where information audits may be undertaken first, or water use metering and reporting requirements, priorities or exemptions.</li> <li>• Improved information to underpin development and application of compliance and enforcement strategies and resourcing for different water resources based on the water resource risk.</li> <li>• Improved information to underpin development of risk-based compliance strategies, priorities and activities.</li> <li>• Improved basis for water management planning activities and priorities.</li> <li>• Improved stakeholder awareness of risk assessment approach and opportunity for targeted input to risk analysis.</li> <li>• Improved water manager awareness of risk-based water management interventions and policy implementation and water manager understanding of theirs and others' roles and responsibilities contributing to effective water management in different risk settings.</li> </ul>
Will consultation be undertaken?	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Our stakeholders are important and will be provided with an opportunity to comment and be involved during the development of the key elements of the new policy framework.</p>
Will all water users across the state need a meter?	<p>A revised water accountability policy will be developed in consultation with stakeholders over the next 18 months. The revised policy will include specifications for where water meters are required and will determine the requirements for meters.</p> <p>Prioritisation and timing of implementation of new requirements will be risk-based and informed by stakeholder consultation.</p>
Why isn't all water use required to be metered?	<p>Tasmania's current <i>Rural Meter Decision Framework</i> specifies meter requirements based on water resource risk. Currently only water use from higher-risk water resources is required to be metered. Development of the revised water accountability framework will look at metering requirements moving forward, which may result in changes to metering requirements.</p>



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Will I be required to keep a record of my water use?	<p>A revised water accountability framework will be developed in consultation with stakeholders over the next 18 months. The revised policy will include specifications for recording and reporting water use.</p> <p>In the meantime, existing requirements still apply as stipulated by the <i>Water Management Regulations 2019</i> which requires that licence holders and groundwater users must keep records of water use and keep those records for a period of 5 years.</p>
Will I be required to report my water use?	<p>Under the current <i>Water Management Regulations 2019</i>, a water licence holder or and groundwater user can be required to provide a copy of their record of water use in the last 5 years at the request of an Authorised Officer.</p> <p>A revised water accountability policy will be developed in consultation with stakeholders over the next 18 months. The revised policy will include specifications for recording and reporting water use.</p>
What is NRE Tas doing to improve water information management?	<p>NRE Tas commenced the Water Information Management Systems (WIMS) Upgrade Project in 2022. WIMS is the State's water licencing and dam permitting system.</p> <p>A functional analysis of system requirements and a business case have been completed and the initial scope of this work has included preliminary consideration of managing metering and water use information as well as customer interface needs.</p> <p>The work also included a review of water registers and information management systems in other jurisdictions (SA, NSW, VIC and QLD). The 2023/24 State Budget allocated \$600,000 for the next stage of work (detailed scoping) to deliver the WIMS upgrade.</p>
I buy water from Tasmanian Irrigation, Hydro Tasmania or another water entity, will this affect me?	<p>Water accountability arrangements for water users accessing water supplied under contract or an irrigation right are subject to terms and conditions applied by the responsible water entity.</p> <p>NRE Tasmania will be working with other water managers over the coming years to improve coordination and sharing of data and better harmonise compliance and enforcement across different water products. This will not affect water users directly in the short term but may result in some changes including new safeguards to better protect water users and water access over the longer term.</p>
Will licence fees increase?	<p>Water fees will not change for now.</p> <p>A review of Tasmania's water licence fees is planned to commence in 2025 and will consider any changes to compliance and water management activities that result from implementing the catchment risk assessment framework.</p> <p>There are numerous actions in the Rural Water Use Strategy to deliver better water management outcomes that will inform any review of water licence fees.</p> <p>Revision of the National Water Initiative (currently underway) may also have implications for the broader water pricing policy framework.</p>
Will I be charged more for the water I use?	<p>The aim of the review is to implement best practice for the management of water in our state. Water pricing changes are not a key driver in this review however all</p>



QUESTION	ANSWER
	aspects of the water accountability framework will be looked at, and any changes recommended will be considered as the new policy is developed and consulted on.

