

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Higgins to the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources:

Water Licenses

1. Please advise how many parties have been sent letters from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources warning that they have not utilised their current water allocation under a license and risk having that allocation decreased?

The Controller of Water Resources has sent letters to 51 licence holders.

2. In reference to question 1 above, what are the identities of those parties and where are they located geographically?

The recipients of the letters are located in three regions in the Northern Territory. In the Douglas Daly Area 13 licence holders have received letters. These licence holders are located across the three water management zones in the Douglas Daly Area, Northern, Central and Southern. In the Katherine area, 35 licence holders have received letters and two licence holders in the Western Davenport area have received letters.

3. What is the intended purpose of these letters and does the Department of Environment and Natural Resources intend to take action under the *Water Act* to vary water licenses for any party in the short-term?

Reducing unused water entitlements will benefit the Northern Territory with more water made available for development thereby supporting the economic growth of the Territory. In areas where water is over allocated, a reduction of the over allocation and a return of water to the environment will occur.

All of the recipients of the letters have used less than 70 per cent of their licensed entitlement for three consecutive 12-month periods. The letters seek to confirm how much water the licence holders are using and how much water they require into the future. Based on the information provided by the licence holder, the Controller of Water Resources will make a decision whether or not to reduce the entitlement under the licence. In some cases, the decision may result in a licence being amended.

The letters relate to the requirement for licence holders to comply with their licence conditions.

4. Has the Department of Environment and Natural Resources taken any action to amend, modify or revoke a water licence in the past 12 months?

Licensing decisions are made by the Controller of Water Resources, a statutory position established by the *Water Act*. In relation to reducing ground water licence entitlements, no, the Controller of Water Resources has not amended, modified or revoked a licence in the past 12 months.

5. If the answer to question 4 is yes, has any application for review been lodged and, if so, what is the status or outcome of that/those review(s)?

Not applicable.

6. How many applications for a grant of a licence to take ground water under section 60 of the *Water Act* are currently pending, and what is the status of those applications and which aquifers would they potentially impact?

There are approximately 208 pending applications for the grant of a new licence to take water under section 60 of the *Water Act*. These include applications in the Darwin rural area where there are 176 applications pending; Western Davenport area where one application is pending and

the Katherine area where there are three applications pending. The balance of applications are dispersed across the Territory.

In addition to these new applications there are also three applications in the Western Davenport area seeking an increase in ground water entitlements and one application in the Katherine area seeking an increase in ground water entitlements.

A range of groundwater systems and the aquifers within those systems are impacted by these licences. That information forms part of the advertised notification process under Part 6A of the *Water Act* and is not provided here.

7. What is the status of the consultation process being undertaken in relation to the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves Policy Framework?

Targeted consultation on the draft Policy Framework was undertaken in 2016 and 2017 with bodies with a history of engagement in water policy matters, a statutory role in water resource management, those which deliver services to people and land where a strategic Aboriginal water reserve may have an impact and broad-ranging interest groups and representative bodies. Briefings and face-to-face consultation occurred with land councils, peak agricultural and fisheries industry bodies, water advisory committees (representing all interests), traditional owners, researchers and individuals. This included a Discussion Paper and prosecution of issues of contention. In response to this consultation, a report was provided to Government and the parameters for drafting the draft Policy Framework were set. The Policy Framework was then formulated and established in October 2017.

Strategic Aboriginal water reserves are being established in new water allocation plans, in line with the Policy Framework. Development of water allocation plans is assisted by water advisory committees which include key water users for that particular plan area.

As the next step in the process of implementing the Policy Framework, a draft Implementation Framework is now under development. Consultation with some key stakeholders has occurred to date and further consultation is planned as the Framework is developed.

8. What is the timeline for any amendments to the *Water Act* in line with the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves policy framework?

The Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves Policy was established in October 2017 and is now publicly available. Introduction of amendments to the *Water Act* to establish Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves as enduring components of water allocation plans and to establish a beneficial use category for that purpose, is currently being drafted. It is scheduled for introduction in the first half of 2019.