

DEPARTMENT OF LANDS PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

SUBJECT: DECLARATION OF THE MATARANKA WATER ALLOCATION PLAN 2024-2034

Min Ref:	
Dep Ref: 42:MIN24:742	
Urgent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Routine	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Meeting/Event	<input type="checkbox"/>
Media	<input type="checkbox"/>
Travel	<input type="checkbox"/>

PURPOSE

1. That you declare the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan 2024-2034 (the Plan).

ISSUES

2. This is the first water allocation plan for the Mataranka plan area, which covers 9,282 square kilometres, including the towns of Mataranka and Larrimah and the community of Jilkminggan.
3. The area includes the Larrimah agricultural development precinct, with pastoral leases covering about 40 percent of the plan area and approximately 36 percent is recognised as Aboriginal land.
4. The Plan is provided for your consideration for declaration, supported by the Background Report and Implementation Actions (Attachments A-C).
5. The Plan was developed with the assistance of the Mataranka Water Advisory Committee (the Committee), which was established in 2017. The Committee held its final meeting on 31 July 2024 and subsequently provided advice to the then Minister on 12 August 2024, supportive of declaring plan (Attachment D).
6. The Plan is informed by the scientific understanding of the water resource, underpinned by water monitoring, assessments, and modelling, including water studies published through the Strategic Regional Environmental and Baseline Assessment (SRENA) and the CSIRO's Roper River water resources assessment.
7. The Plan manages the Tindall Limestone Aquifer (aquifer) and is highly conservative, preserving more than 90 percent dry season flows in the Roper River, and greater protections for the outstanding environmental values of Bitter and Rainbow Springs.
8. The aquifer and the Roper River are subject to a continuous monitoring regime, substantive groundwater investigations and resource assessments and a comprehensive surface and groundwater integrated model.
9. The Plan sets an estimated sustainable yield of 62,474 Megalitres (ML) per year, which is distributed between the three water management zones:
 - Larrimah has the most amount of water available at 35,238 ML per year to support development, where extraction will have minimal impact on flows in the Roper River.
 - South Mataranka only has water available for licencing through the Aboriginal Water Reserve (AWR), as the allocation at 24,492 ML per year is largely licenced.
 - North Mataranka has the least amount of water allocated and licenced at 2,744 ML per year to provide the highest protection to the springs and where development is marginal.
10. The Plan allocates 4,574 ML per year to the AWR, which could increase to a maximum of 11,171 ML per year with the recovery of unused water.
11. The Committee was established to develop the Plan and has completed its role following the last meeting on 31 July 2024. Draft letters to the members have been prepared to dissolve the Committee.
12. An instrument has been prepared to declare the Plan with the Plan coming into force on publication of the instrument in the Gazette.
13. **Consultation:** The development of the Plan started in 2017 and is summarised in the Consultation Summary (Attachment E), including the Committee, stakeholder meetings and public comments received during the 11 week public consultation period on the draft plan in 2024. Public consultation received 877 responses (32 detailed, 10 surveys and the remaining campaign template submissions).
14. Feedback received during the public consultation period has resulted in some amendments to the background document with additional information included to clarify the basis of management, incorporation of the CSIRO's Roper River water assessment published during the consultation period, clarification on modelling information and additional analysis of long term flow trends as well

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NT
TABLED DOCUMENTS

Executive Director: Amy Dysart / 44135

Committee: Estimates
 Paper No: 93 Date: 18/16/25
 Tabled By: Davis
 Signed: [Signature]

as further context regarding the hydrogeological setting, interconnectivity and natural water balance. Minimal changes to the plan have been made noting that the final plan for declaration reflects a slightly higher (45ML per annum) ESY in the South Mataranka water management zone and overall as a result of the Controller of Water Resources (Controller) approving a small increase in a water extraction licence. Minor amendments were made to the implementation actions document.

15. As required by the *Water Act 1992*, the Northern Land Council was consulted regarding the designation of eligible land for the AWR in which a response was received on the 12 September 2024.
16. **Media:** Key messages have been prepared for the declaration as part of the Department's communications plan (Attachment F).
17. **Risks:** There has been significant public commentary regarding the Mataranka water allocation plan, its development and engagement, of most note was the ABC's Four Corner episode aired in August 2024. The consultation paper provides a response to these issues. Irrespective of this it is anticipated that declaration of the plan will evoke criticism from some sectors of the community, in particular environment groups and traditional owners.
18. In late July 2024, members of the Jilkminggan community separately petitioned the former Minister for Water Security, their local member and the Controller advising of their concerns regarding the level of water to be made available under the draft plan. The Controller will be meeting with the community's members and other communities early in the new year.

BACKGROUND

19. Water allocation plans are declared under the *Water Act 1992* by notice in the Gazette and can remain in force for a period not longer than 10 years.

RECOMMENDATION

- a) note the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan 2024-2034 (Attachments A, B and C)
- b) sign the instrument to declare the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan 2024-2034
- c) note the advice from the Mataranka Water Advisory Committee (Attachment D)
- d) note the consultation summary (Attachment E)
- e) sign the letters to the members of the Mataranka Water Advisory Committee.
- f) note the key messages (Attachments F)

- a) NOTED
- b) SIGNED / NOT SIGNED
- c) NOTED
- d) NOTED
- e) SIGNED / NOT SIGNED
- f) NOTED



MINISTER FOR WATER RESOURCES

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State Square
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minister.burgoyne@nt.gov.au

GPO Box 3146
Darwin NT 0801
Telephone: 08 8999 8700

Dr Rebecca Mohr-Bell

Via email: s56(1)(a)

Dear Dr Mohr-Bell

I am pleased to advise that I recently declared the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan 2024-2034 (the Plan). The Plan will have effect when a notice is published in the Government Gazette.

The Plan is the first for the area for the Tindall Limestone Aquifer and protects dry season flows to the Roper River and sets the regulatory arrangements in the plan area.

I would like to thank you for your exceptional leadership as the independent chair of the Mataranka Water Advisory Committee since its first meeting in late 2017 to date, in developing the Plan. Your expertise in governance has been invaluable to the progress of the Plan. I commend your dedication and the Committee's significant contributions to the planning process from the inception in 2017.

Information about the Plan is available on the Mataranka Plan website, available at: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-control-districts/daly-roper-bee/aloo/mataranka-water-allocation-plan>

Yours sincerely

JOSHUA BURGoyNE



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Mr David Ciaravolo

Via email: s56(1)(a)

Dear Mr Ciaravolo

I am pleased to advise that I recently declared the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan 2024-2034 (the Plan). The Plan will have effect when a notice is published in the Government Gazette.

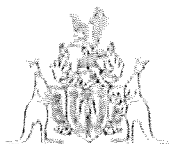
The Plan is the first for the area for the Tindall Limestone Aquifer and protects dry season flows to the Roper River and sets the regulatory arrangements in the plan area.

I would like to thank you for your valuable contribution as a member of the Mataranka Water Advisory Committee to developing the Plan. Your capability in supporting policy, planning, and programs at the community government interface has been contributory in the development of the Plan. I acknowledge the considerable time in the development and commend the Committee's contribution to the planning process over these past years.

Information about the Plan is available on the Mataranka plan website, available at: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-control-districts/daly-roper-beetaloo/mataranka-water-allocation-plan>

Yours sincerely

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Professor Jenny Davis

Via email: s56(1)(a)

Dear Professor Davis

I am pleased to advise that I recently declared the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan 2024-2034 (the Plan). The Plan will have effect when a notice is published in the Government Gazette.

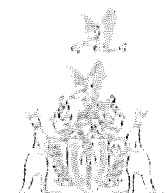
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Yours sincerely

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Ms Sarah Kerin

Via email: Sarah.Kerin@nt.gov.au

Dear Ms Kerin

I am pleased to advise that I recently declared the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan 2024-2034 (the Plan). The Plan will have effect when a notice is published in the Government Gazette.

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I would like to thank you for your valuable contribution as a member of the Mataranka Water Advisory Committee to developing the Plan. Your background in conservation and your understanding of water resources in supporting the region's tourism industry have been instrumental in developing the Plan. I acknowledge the considerable time in the development and commend the Committee's contribution to the planning process over these past years.

Information about the Plan is available on the Mataranka Plan website, available at: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-control-districts/daly-roper-beetaloo/mataranka-water-allocation-plan>

Yours sincerely

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Mr Vincent Lange

Via email: s56(1)(a)

Dear Mr Lange

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Yours sincerely

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Ms Clair O'Brien

Via email: s56(1)(a)

Dear Ms O'Brien

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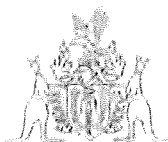
The Plan is the first for the area for the Tindall Limestone Aquifer and protects dry season flows to the Roper River and sets the regulatory arrangements in the plan area.

I would like to thank you for your valuable contribution as a member of the Mataranka Water Advisory Committee to developing the Plan. I acknowledge the considerable time in the development and commend the Committee's contribution to the planning process over these past years. Furthermore, I commend your dedication and significant contributions to the planning process from the inception of the committee in 2008.

Information about the Plan is available on the Mataranka Plan website, available at: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-control-districts/daly-roper-beetaloo/mataranka-water-allocation-plan>

Yours sincerely

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Mr Rohan Sullivan

Via email:

s56(1)(a)

Dear Mr Sullivan

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I would like to thank you for your valuable contribution as a member of the Mataranka Water Advisory Committee to developing the Plan. I acknowledge the considerable time in the development and commend the Committee's contribution to the planning process over these past years.

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Yours sincerely

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Mr Julian Martin

Via email: s56(1)(a)

Dear Mr Martin

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Yours sincerely

JOSHUA BURGOYNE



Northern Territory of Australia

Water Act 1992

**Declaration of Water Allocation Plan: Daly Roper Beetaloo
Water Control District**

I, Joshua Roland Burgoyne, Minister for Water Resources:

- (a) under section 22B(1) of the *Water Act 1992*, declare the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan 2024-2034 to be a water allocation plan in respect of the Daly Roper Beetaloo Water Control District; and
- (b) under section 22B(2) of the Act, specify that the water allocation plan will remain in force for 10 years commencing on the date this instrument is published in the *Gazette*.

.....
Minister for Water Resources

Dated

12th August 2024

Dear Minister

The Mataranka Water Advisory Committee (committee) recommend that you, the Minister, declare the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan (plan) as soon as practicable. This committee, in place since 2017, have seen significant development of the science that has informed the plan and are strongly of the opinion that there is significantly greater risk to the water resource in the absence of a plan in place, and as such, advise you declare the plan as soon as possible. We also wish to bring it to your attention, that there has been multiple Mataranka Water Advisory Committees to date, but no declared plan. At least one committee member has been part of all these committees, starting in 2008. Committee deliberation and scientific review has been extensive and it is beyond time for a Mataranka Water Plan to be enacted.

Importantly, the committee advise that their support for this plan is contingent on the plan being fully implemented, including appropriate resourcing, to ensure the management objectives and implementation actions are delivered as specified, and commence on the plan's declaration.

While the committee is unanimous in their advice regarding your declaration of the plan, there were differing views regarding the estimated sustainable yield (ESY). The committee agree that they have been provided sound information on which to base their advice and that the ESY is based on science. Six of the eight committee members agree that the ESY is suitably precautionary and appropriate to ensure the ongoing protection of the water resource and the diversity of values that the resource supports. However, two of the eight committee members felt that the ESY in the south Mataranka management zone was not precautionary enough, with one member of the view that the ESY in this zone be reduced by a further 20-30 per cent.

The committee have reviewed the Consultation Summary and are satisfied that it is an accurate record of feedback provided by the community during the consultation process. In addition to the above advice, the committee provides the following response to the themes identified in the Consultation Summary.

Science underpinning the plan

The committee would like you to carefully consider the application of the Roper Discharge Zone and the proposed Protected Environmental Area. While the committee notes that this mechanism is intended to balance the protection of environmental and economic values, the impacts of this mechanism are not borne equally by all members of the community across the plan area and may directly negatively impact some properties. As such, the committee suggest that the effectiveness of this mechanism be assessed on the plan's review, with a considered evaluation as to whether these are the right mechanisms, or if a similar outcome may be achieved through an alternative, potentially more equitable, means.

Approach in the plan

Water management zones were discussed by the committee at length over numerous meetings during the plan's development. The committee is satisfied that the plan does not consider the water resource as a disconnected system, but rather the proposed zones enable the application of tailored management actions to a particular region, appropriate to the context and activities.

The committee accept that the values of the water resource were not clear to the broader community in the draft plan, however the committee workshopped the values of the water resource early in the water planning process with these values translated into the plan's objectives which are further reflected in the categorisation of the implementation actions. The committee recognises that while the development of the plan has had some input from local Aboriginal people, improving participation of Aboriginal people in the implementation phase of the plan is key to developing broader community support for the plan and further refining the Aboriginal cultural values of the plan.

How water is shared

The committee support Aboriginal economic development and are confident that the plan balances the importance of the environmental values as well as the desire for Aboriginal economic development. The committee notes that over time, the Recovery of Unused Water Policy will be used to furnish the Aboriginal water reserve.

How people were engaged

The committee confirms that all members participated in the development of the plan to the best of their ability and is grateful to the commenters and interested parties for their input into the draft plan. However, the committee feel that some of the public comment feedback reflected a lack of understanding of the complexity of the water resource, the plan and the management mechanisms proposed.

The committee would like to see the department engage in different ways and recommends that additional resources are invested in communication, particularly regarding the more complex and nuanced management mechanisms proposed by the plan, as the committee consider there that this will be required to achieve broad acceptance of the plan.

The committee confirms to the Minister that having a diversity of viewpoints on a committee is important and should be maintained on future water advisory committees. The committee further recommends to the Minister that appropriate resources be committed to ensure plans are produced in a reasonable time, as well as to allow the Water Advisory Committee to deliver on its objectives and terms of reference in a reasonable timeframe.

Protection of ecological values

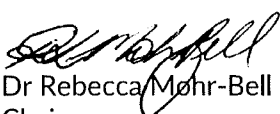
The protection of ecological values has been central to planning process. The committee recognise the plan's implementation will be used to prioritise and resource further science, that will provide more detailed understanding of the environmental and ecological values of the water resource and is the basis for the committee recommending the plan be declared.

Understanding of social and economic values

The committee wish to impress upon the Minister that potable water supply across the plan area, and the flow of the Roper River has been front of mind to the committee during the development of the plan, since its inception. With regards to concerns around the drinking water security and irreversible harm to the water resource the committee emphasises that it is imperative to fully enact the plan as the risk to the values of the water resource is far greater without a plan being declared.

In summary, the committee feels that the issues and risks identified in the public comments are better mitigated and addressed through the declaration of the plan, providing the plan implementation is adequately resourced, and the implementation actions and additional effort in the communication of the water plan is supported. The committee note that they have not reviewed the final plan documents, but have responded to the draft plan, consultation summary and were updated on any proposed changes as a result of the feedback and consultation process. While under ideal circumstances the committee would review the updated document, the committee feel confident that the plan development and prolonged committee contribution is sufficient and there is no reason for further delay to the plan's declaration.

Regards



Dr Rebecca Mohr-Bell
Chair

Mataranka Water Advisory Committee