



*Prescription is a means by which water resources can be sustainably managed*



**Government of South Australia**

Department of Water, Land and  
Biodiversity Conservation

# Prescription of water resources

## Fact sheet 26



### What is prescription?

Prescription is a means by which water resources can be sustainably managed to provide security for all water users, now and into the future.

It is set in motion when the level of water use in an area indicates that regulatory control is needed to secure sustainable management and support water dependent ecosystems.

Prescription is recommended to the Governor by the Minister for Environment and Conservation only after analysis of a region's water resources and consultation with the community.

Prescription is administered by the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC).

Once a water resource is prescribed, all people who take water from that prescribed resource will need a licence or approval from the Minister to do so. The main exception is that taking water for stock (not including intensive stock keeping such as feedlots, piggeries, chicken farms etc) and water for domestic use can be exempted from licensing requirements. Taking water for fire fighting and road making are currently exempt from licensing.

Each licence specifies how much water is allocated and how the allocated water can be taken or used, as well as any other relevant conditions or controls. Licences are issued by DWLBC on behalf of the Minister.

Once a water resource is prescribed, a water allocation plan is prepared by the relevant regional natural resources management board. The plan contains the criteria by which decisions about the allocation, transfer and use of water are made. Among other things, this plan influences the conditions that are attached to any water licences that are issued. The water allocation plan is prepared in close consultation with the community and is adopted by the relevant Minister.

### What does prescription mean for existing users of water?

Existing users have first right to licensed water allocations. To be formally acknowledged as an existing user, users of the prescribed water resource/s need to apply to DWLBC for a licence and a water allocation within six months following prescription. The amount allocated is based on an estimation of the reasonable future requirements of the applicant and consideration of the sustainable capacity of the resource.

### What about other people who may wish to use water in the future?

People who do not qualify as an existing user but wish to use water in the future will also need to apply for a licence. Following the issue of licences to existing users, additional allocations can be made under the provisions set out in the water allocation plan, if the sustainable capacity of the resource can accommodate such additional allocations. The amount allocated will be based on an estimation of the reasonable future requirements of the applicant.



and consideration of the sustainable capacity of the resource. People may also have the opportunity to purchase allocations from other water licence holders.

### What are the benefits of prescription?

Prescription establishes a system for more sustainable sharing of the nominated resource and protects against the unregulated extraction of additional water. Water resource development is allowed to continue up to designated sustainable limits.

Once these limits are reached, further development can still occur through trading of water. Security of water access is therefore increased and conflicts over water sharing reduced.

Water users are licensed to take a defined allocation of water. The water licence provides water users with a level of clarity and certainty in relation to their access to water. A water licence can also be a valuable asset.

Generally under prescription, all water users, including the environment, will be protected from over use and degradation of the resource. The long-term health of the area's wetlands and rivers is maintained by ensuring that the needs of water dependent ecosystems are protected.

### What is the process for prescribing a resource?

The Minister initially announces an intention to prescribe the resource. This triggers a period of consultation when the community has the opportunity to comment on the proposal. Following this period of consultation, the Minister considers all comments received and makes a decision on whether to recommend that the resource be prescribed or not.

If, on the Minister's recommendation, the designated water resources of an area are prescribed, work commences on preparing a water allocation plan. The regional natural resources management board works with the community to prepare the plan.

### How long does the process take?

The length of the process will vary for each area depending on a number of factors related to the size of the area and the nature of the water resource. To find out more about the process for a particular area, please contact DWLBC.

## NOTICE OF INTENT TO PRESCRIBE

Community consultation

Minister considers submissions and makes a decision about prescription

## PRESCRIPTION

Preparation of water allocation plan including:

- Community consultation
- Technical investigations:
  - » Capacity of water resources
  - » Ecosystem water needs

Existing users have 6 months from date of prescription to apply for a licence

Applications are processed

Water allocation plan adopted by the Minister

Licences issued

Ongoing implementation of water allocation plan and licensing system



## Want to know more?

This brochure is one of a series of publications about water resource management. Further details and contact information are included below.

### For further information

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