



Government  
of South Australia

# Managing the water resource impacts of plantation forests

A Statewide policy framework



## Why do we need a statewide policy framework?

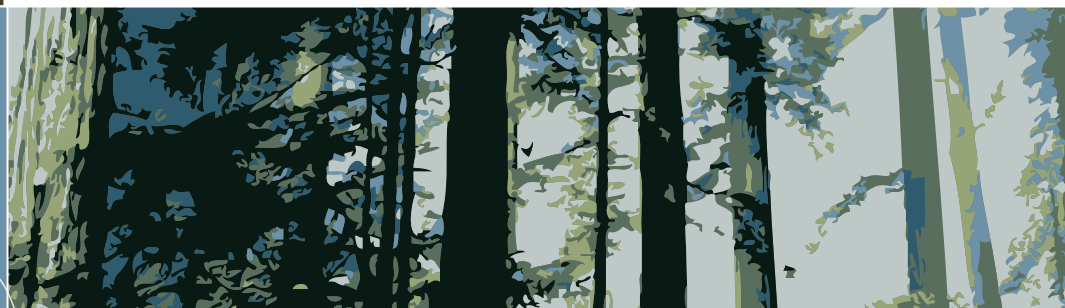
South Australia, and the nation, is facing an unprecedented challenge to protect its precious water resources. The demands on water are many - flows must be secured for critical human needs, for sustainable industry development and for environmental assets. In the context of drought, climate change and increasing demand, the sustainable management of water resources is vital.

The Intergovernmental Agreement on a National Water Initiative (NWI) requires significant water intercepting activities to be accounted for and managed. Large-scale commercial plantation forests (along with dams and bores) are examples of activities that have the potential to intercept large volumes of water now, and in the future. All industries that affect the security of water resources need to be managed within sustainable limits.

Plantation forests intercept water by reducing surface water run-off and groundwater aquifer recharge and, in areas with shallow water tables, by directly extracting groundwater. In South Australia, plantation forestry is currently a significant land use in the higher rainfall areas of the Lower South East, Kangaroo Island and the Mount Lofty Ranges.

In recognition of this, the Government of South Australia has recently adopted a statewide policy framework for managing the water resource impacts of plantation forests. The policy framework will help government meet its obligations and strategic targets to ensure the long-term availability of South Australia's water resources for the benefit of all water users, including the environment.

While the sustainable management of water resources is the key driver for the development of the framework, the benefits of plantation forests to the economy and regional prosperity are also important. Consistent with the National Forest Policy Statement, the policy framework will ensure that plantation forests continue to be valued and can further develop, as long as sustainable limits for water resource development are not exceeded. The policy framework will provide certainty to the plantation forest industry and help strike a balance between the social, economic and environmental needs of our State.



## What does it cover?

The policy framework sets high-level principles and provides guidance to state government agencies and regional natural resource management (NRM) boards to:

- ensure that water-affecting activities are identified and managed within sustainable limits
- promote the use of appropriate management tools, and
- effectively account for the environmental, social and economic impacts of water allocation decisions.

In particular, the framework provides direction for the development of state and regional NRM plans, including water allocation plans. It also recognises that plantation forests are a dryland crop and use water differently to irrigated agriculture and other water uses.

The development of the policy framework has been informed by the best available science, independently assessed by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO).

## Guiding principles

There are 12 policy principles that underpin the framework and highlight the approaches and values that will be used to guide and inform implementation of the framework.

- Sustainable management of water resources
- Optimise net benefits to the community
- Sustainable industry development
- Consistent and transparent treatment of water users
- Use markets and trading
- Best practice regulatory approach
- Science-informed policy and planning
- Adaptive and precautionary approaches to managing water resources
- Clear open communication and participatory management
- Accounting for regional settings
- Recognition of State, National and International directions and obligations
- Consistent terminology

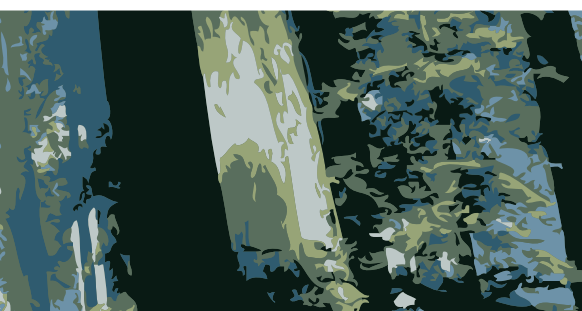
## Management Options

There are a number of options for managing water resources. The policy framework provides a decision support tool to help planners and decision-makers work out what is the best option to manage the water resource impacts of plantation forests in a specific set of circumstances.

Management options include:

- A water licence under the Natural Resources Management Act 2004 (NRM Act) – The licensing system manages water resources by allocating specific volumes to licensed users of a prescribed water resource. It is proposed to establish a forest water licensing scheme that will provide commercial plantation forest owners/managers with a tradeable asset (a water allocation) similar to other licensed water users.
- A water-affecting activity permit under the NRM Act – The permit system manages water-affecting activities by controlling their extent and nature. Where water is available, a permit may be issued to allow expansion of plantation forests at ecologically sustainable limits.
- Codes of practice and industry agreements – Codes of practice and industry agreements can be developed in consultation with industry to support regulatory options like licences and permits.

Based on the scientific evidence of the impacts of plantation forests on water resources, the policy framework provides that both forest water licences and permits are appropriate tools to manage these impacts. Their applicability depends on whether a water resource is prescribed or not under the NRM Act, the condition of and extent of pressure on water resources, the current and future likely extent of plantation forests, and their impacts relative to other water uses.





## How will it be implemented?

Government, industry and communities, and their willingness and ability to work together to achieve ecologically sustainable plantation forests and best practice water resource management, are critical to realising the vision of the policy framework.

The policy framework will be largely implemented through both regional NRM and water allocation plans. Planning processes will ensure that there is transparent community consultation and all interested parties are encouraged to participate. These processes will be based on a partnership approach with clearly defined roles and responsibilities established for state government agencies, regional NRM boards and water users.

## Where can I find out more about the policy framework?

Copies of the policy framework and further information can be found at the following websites:

[www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au](http://www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au)

[www.pirsa.sa.gov.au](http://www.pirsa.sa.gov.au)

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