

Water Allocation Plan for the Southern Basins and Musgrave Prescribed Wells Areas

Draft of revised WAP 2026

Brief summary of major items in revised WAP 2026

Items applying in both Prescribed Wells Areas

- 1. Less groundwater available** – The draft WAP has reduced the estimated volume of groundwater that can be allocated, based on observed reductions in recharge (refilling of aquifers) and the increasing influence of a drying climate – a 10% reduction in recharge has been applied to the Quaternary Limestone aquifers (see section 4.2.2 in the draft WAP).
- 2. Environmental water provided** – The draft WAP has kept the environmental water provisions from the previous WAP that aim to maintain the condition of groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs) such as deep-rooted redgums, and the environments that rely on inland seeps and soaks, groundwater-fed lakes, and coastal springs (see section 5.5).
- 3. Environmental monitoring** – The WAP review process has identified that changes are needed to the methods used to assess any impacts from groundwater extraction on the extent and health of groundwater dependent ecosystems, while considering the impacts of measured reductions in rainfall and the predicted heating and drying of the region due to climate change – this issue will be addressed in the monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement plan, which is to be developed.
- 4. Aboriginal water interests** – The draft WAP has included information about Aboriginal water interests, given the traditional and cultural importance of groundwater and the ecosystems it supports, and the legal rights to use groundwater for Native Title purposes. It also explores future possibilities for groundwater to provide economic opportunities for the Native Title holders, as per the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, that the SA Government is a signatory to (see Chapter 6).
- 5. Livestock water supplies** – The draft WAP has kept the livestock water provisions from the previous WAP, which adopted a figure equivalent to 7.14 Litres per day per Dry Sheep Equivalent, which included an allowance for on-farm losses. Groundwater extraction for livestock is not licensed (see section 8.4.2).
- 6. Rural domestic water** – The draft WAP has kept the previous WAP's provisions for domestic (house and garden) water use from wells, which were based on an estimate of annual water consumption per well (280 kL/yr) and an assessment of the number of wells listed as being for 'domestic use' (see section 8.4.2).

7. **Fixed water allocations** – The draft WAP proposes to adopt fixed water allocations for the Coffin Bay, Uley South, and Lincoln North basins (see other items for the rationale for these). A fixed allocation has been kept for the Aquaculture Elliston basin, which has previously had rigorous assessment and operates with ongoing monitoring and reporting requirements and a groundwater management plan. The Southern Basins Tertiary, Southern Basins Basement, Musgrave Tertiary, and Musgrave Basement are basins that are at a greater depth, with little response to rainfall variation, and a fixed allocation has also been kept for these (see section 9.4.2).
8. **Risk management plans** – The draft WAP proposes to require a risk assessment be undertaken and a Risk Management and Monitoring Plan (RMMP) be developed for any licence holder using a water access entitlement of 50 ML per year or above. The licensee will be required to operate in accordance with the RMMP and report on compliance with it at intervals determined to be appropriate by the Minister. The RMMP becomes a condition of their water licence and is aimed at managing risks, e.g. impacts on groundwater levels, salinity, nearby groundwater users or groundwater dependent ecosystems. SA Water has already been required to implement a RMMP for the Uley South basin, from the 2024-25 water year onwards, with the main focus being the risk of seawater intrusion affecting public water supply wells close to the coast. This change will mainly affect SA Water, but will also apply to any private licence holders wishing to use their large water access entitlement (see sections 10.8, 10.13, 11.2 and 11.4).
9. **Simpler allocations and increased water security** – The draft WAP proposes a change to the process used to set annual water allocations for those basins that are adaptively managed, i.e. Uley North, Bramfield, Poldia and Sheringa. Instead of applying a continuous rate of change of water allocations, a simpler three-step allocation scale is proposed, with allocations either being 100%, 65% or 35%, depending on groundwater levels in comparison to the applicable trigger level for each basin. This approach aims to minimise the possibility of a 0% allocation, but this can still occur via other measures if groundwater levels are low enough. The approach will enhance short-term water security for licence holders and will simplify the implementation of the WAP (see section 9.4.1.2).

Items applying only to the Southern Basins Prescribed Wells Area

10. **Less water from Uley South** – The draft WAP has proposed a reduction in public water supply extraction from the Uley South basin in the Southern Basins, which is the only licensed extraction. The current potential maximum extraction of 7.3 GL per year will be reduced to a fixed allocation of 3.5 GL per year. The reduction is based on monitoring, modelling, climate projections, falling groundwater levels, a trend of rising groundwater salinity and an increasing risk of seawater intrusion. The fixed allocation will support regional water security and is informed by the extensive monitoring and groundwater modelling done for this basin (see section 4.3.1).
11. **Closure of Lincoln South** – The draft WAP has proposed that public water supply extraction from the Lincoln South basin in the Southern Basins, which is the only licensed extraction, will stop. The current potential maximum extraction is 929 ML per year. The decision is based on falling groundwater levels and increasing salinity risks from underlying saline groundwater and from seawater intrusion (see section 3.3.1).

- 12. Closure of Uley Wanilla** – The draft WAP has proposed that public water supply extraction from the Uley Wanilla basin in the Southern Basins, which is the only licensed extraction, will stop. The current potential maximum extraction is 231 ML per year. This was based on falling groundwater levels, risks to groundwater dependent ecosystems (redgums) and a trend of rising groundwater salinity (see section 3.3.1).
- 13. Regional mains water security** – The draft WAP proposes reducing public water supply extractions in the Uley South, Lincoln South and Uley Wanilla basins by a total of 4.93 GL per year for the long term. SA Water’s Port Lincoln desalination plant is being constructed to offset this reduction, with a start date currently estimated at late 2026. The draft WAP proposes a conditional allocation from the Uley South basin for the 2026-27 Water Year, given that the desalination plant is not scheduled to be online until part way through that year. The Risk Management and Monitoring Plan for the Uley South basin will be used to address risks arising from this conditional allocation (see section 10.1).
- 14. Coffin Bay basin** – The draft WAP has kept public water supply and private licensed extractions from the Coffin Bay basin the same as in the current WAP, as additional data resulted in an increase in the estimated size of the recharge zone, which offset the 10% reduction in estimated recharge per year. Allocations for this basin will now be fixed, due to the nature of the aquifer. SA Water will be required to implement a Risk Management and Monitoring Plan focussing on operational strategies as a more targeted approach to risk management, rather than the previous use of annual variation of water allocations (see section 3.2.1).
- 15. Lincoln North basin** – The draft WAP’s updated estimate of the volume of this resource has resulted in the need for reductions to water access entitlements, affecting six private water licence holders. However, a fixed allocation is proposed due to the current lack of data to inform an adaptive approach. This will provide licence holders with a more secure water access entitlement, but with a reduced volume (see section 4.2).

Items applying only to the Musgrave Prescribed Wells Area

- 16. Bramfield basin** – Water allocations from the Bramfield basin will continue to be managed via an adaptive approach based on monitoring of groundwater levels and the allocation approach in the draft WAP. However, the revised 'trigger response' allocation approach will give greater water security for the Elliston town water supply. This revised approach has a 35% figure as the lowest allocation when groundwater levels are low. This will provide 70 ML of water for Elliston, which is approximately what the town currently uses.

A Risk Management and Monitoring Plan will be required for users of water access entitlements of 50 ML or more, to ensure that risks from falling groundwater levels and seawater intrusion are managed. In the future, these risks may require alternative town water supply options to be revisited.

The geographic area of the Bramfield basin has been reduced, to focus on the freshwater lens which supplies licensed extractions of groundwater, for both public water supply and private use (see section 4.3.2).