

# ELMA – what you need to know

ELMA is an Environmental Land Management Allocation. It is granted to eligible landholders in the Lower Murray Reclaimed Irrigation Area (LMRIA) for the purpose of managing soil issues unique to the area.



## Why do we have ELMA?

Land within the LMRIA is low lying, typically below the level of the River Murray and a natural discharge point for saline groundwater. Soils are also clay based and prone to cracking when they dry out. Unlike many other soil types, LMRIA soils require active management in order to maintain their productive capacity – by regular irrigation, levelling and drainage.

ELMA licences were originally granted to LMRIA landholders for the purpose of minimising the effects of cracking and soil salinity on irrigated pasture or on land retired from irrigation. Since the Millennium Drought, it has also become evident that application of ELMA helps minimise oxidation of acid sulfate soils, which can pose water quality risks to the river and SA Water offtakes.

Under the *Murray-Darling Basin Agreement* (the Agreement), 22.2 gigalitres (GL) of the state's entitlement is reserved for ELMA.

ELMA may only be used in the Lower Murray Swamps (i.e. the LMRIA) for the purpose of environmental land management.

Under the Agreement, ELMA cannot be traded. This is in recognition that if Class 3 water is traded away, some water is required to manage soil issues unique to the LMRIA.

The Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse (the plan) must be consistent with the Agreement and sets out the rules for sharing ELMA.

For a copy of the plan go to:

[www.landscape.sa.gov.au/mr/water/water-allocation-plans/river-murray-wap](http://www.landscape.sa.gov.au/mr/water/water-allocation-plans/river-murray-wap)

## Important information about ELMA

The Minister for Environment and Water (the minister) holds the 22.2 GL volume set aside for ELMA and may grant entitlements to landowners of ELMA eligible land parcels.

ELMA eligible land parcels are the same land parcels that were granted ELMA historically, these parcels are listed in the plan.

ELMA are attached to the land and entitlements are issued to the owner or the occupier of the land for 5 years and then expire (refer to What next section below).

ELMA is not an ongoing personal property right like Class 3 (irrigation) entitlements.

Upon sale of the land, ELMA reverts to the minister. New landholders may apply to the minister for entitlements.

### Objectives for the use of ELMA

ELMA is to be used for environmental land management purposes (i.e. soil management), not productive purposes. ELMA is granted to contribute to the protection of land and infrastructure of the LMRIA, including by:

- reducing soil salinisation as a result of saline groundwater discharge
- minimising oxidation of acid sulfate soils, and
- minimising cracking and movement of soils.

Application of ELMA alone is not sufficient to manage soils and produce commercially viable crops. While ELMA may have production benefits, Class 3 (irrigation) water will likely be required on top of ELMA for productive purposes.

### Can ELMA be carried over?

ELMA cannot be carried over because ELMA should be applied in full to the land each year. Future plan reviews will re-examine if this can be altered based on information collected in coming years.



## What's in the plan?

ELMA will be redistributed in line with **optimised application** rates (in ML/ha). The optimised rates give all entitlement holders equal ability to manage their land and are different to the former originating rates. A review of the originating rates found the objectives for ELMA could not be met across the entire LMRIA.

A **ten year transition period** (i.e. two five year terms) will apply for licensees who qualify to maintain the originating ELMA rate. Licensees qualify for the originating rate where it is greater than the optimised rate and ELMA water use has been 90% or more. There are also similar allowances for **family succession planning**, e.g. if a person qualified for the originating rate and the land is passed down to a family member (as defined in the plan) then the originating rate can be maintained for up to 10 years.

To provide greater security, ELMA licences will be granted for an initial **5 year term** and reviewed. A further 5 year term may be granted (see below for further information on applying for ELMA).

ELMA will not initially be granted to people who have not been using ELMA unless landowners can demonstrate, to the minister's satisfaction, a **prior commitment** to commence using ELMA. If the criteria is satisfied they will be granted ELMA at the optimised rates.

While some landholders may not initially qualify for ELMA, the land will remain eligible for ELMA and once you are able to deliver ELMA to your land you will be eligible to apply for an ELMA licence.

If you apply for ELMA between 5 year terms, the situation may arise where there is insufficient ELMA shares available to grant an entitlement at that time. In this case, you will need to wait until the end of the first (or second) five year term (whichever is relevant at the time) for your application to be granted.

### What happens if demand for ELMA exceeds the 22.2 GL cap?

If demand for ELMA exceeds the volume available, proportional reductions will be applied to all ELMA licensees to ensure the 22.2 GL is not exceeded.

Scenario testing indicates the likelihood of exceeding 22.2 GL is low but it is not possible to determine exactly how many ELMA applications will be approved and the volume which will be required to meet demand.

There is no risk of proportional reductions after ten years as there is enough ELMA at the optimised rates for all eligible land parcels.

### What next?

The board will work closely with the Department for Environment and Water (DEW) to implement the ELMA policy.

**Current ELMA entitlements expire on 30 June 2022.**

**Prior to the 2022-23 water use year the Water Licensing Branch of DEW will advise eligible landholders how to apply for ELMA.**

For more information, please contact Berri water licensing office on (08) 8595 2053 or via email [dewwaterlicensingberri@sa.gov.au](mailto:dewwaterlicensingberri@sa.gov.au)

## Good to know ...

### Will I need to apply for ELMA at the end of every 5 year term?

Initially everyone one with eligible land will need to apply for ELMA. Thereafter, only people who have not previously applied for ELMA will need to apply unless informed otherwise. Please note, if new users qualify for ELMA at commencement of the second 5 year term, and proportional reductions are required your volume may not be the same when your licence is reissued.

It is important upon receipt of your new licence that you note the number of shares available to avoid possible over use charges.



### How should ELMA be applied?

The best land management outcomes can be achieved by careful **irrigation management**. Large, infrequent irrigations are best for managing salinity. For further information contact the board's Sustainable Water Use Team Leader on 0429 093 779.

### Can ELMA application be enforced?

We acknowledge third party impacts may occur if neighbouring landholders do not apply ELMA to their land. The plan sets out how ELMA will be shared amongst eligible landholders, however the plan can't force licensees to apply the water to the land. During the life of the plan entitlements will continue to be reviewed based on usage. This information will guide future reviews of the plan and further redistribution of ELMA if required.

### Who is eligible for ELMA?

To be eligible for ELMA, a landholder must have ELMA eligible land and the ability to meter usage.

### Is ELMA recorded first?

ELMA (Class 8) is recorded as the first water through the meter (i.e. before Class 3).

### Can I make a private supply agreement?

Yes, a private supply agreement can be negotiated between adjoining landholders to assist with the application of ELMA (subject to compliant metering arrangements to record water use). For more information on metering requirements, contact DEW Licensing on (08) 8595 2053.

### Are there any reporting requirements?

To ensure compliance and help inform future reviews of ELMA, licensees will be required to submit a report about where ELMA is being applied etc. in line with site use and works approval conditions.

You will be notified by the board when you are required to submit a report, including what information you need to provide.

### Are Trusts responsible for ELMA?

Management of ELMA is not the responsibility of any trust. ELMA water is granted to individual landowners not the trust.

### Where to find the reports about the optimised ELMA rates?

The scientific reports are available on the board's website:

[www.landscape.sa.gov.au/mr/water/water-allocation-plans/river-murray-wap/elmareview](http://www.landscape.sa.gov.au/mr/water/water-allocation-plans/river-murray-wap/elmareview)

### What is the difference between ELMA and water for the environment?

ELMA is specifically for the management of soil issues which are unique to the LMRIA and for the protection of and infrastructure e.g. levee banks, laser levelled paddocks, etc.

Environmental water is for the maintenance or rehabilitation of aquatic or riparian ecosystems. Its primary purpose is for the protection and conservation of biodiversity.

## More information

### about the plan contact the board's...

Senior Project Officer, Water Planning  
Email: [rmwap.feedback@sa.gov.au](mailto:rmwap.feedback@sa.gov.au)  
Phone: 0428 113 442

### about irrigation contact the boards...

Team Leader, Sustainable Water Use  
Email: [michael.cutting@sa.gov.au](mailto:michael.cutting@sa.gov.au)  
Phone: 0429 093 779

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

### about licensing contact DEW...

Berri Water Licensing Office  
Email: [dewaterlicensingberri@sa.gov.au](mailto:dewaterlicensingberri@sa.gov.au)  
Phone: (08) 8595 2053

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