
Please note that this publication is intended only as a general introduction to the relevant provisions of the Commonwealth Water Act 2007 and should be read in conjunction with the Water Act and the Water Regulations 2008.

Accelerating national water reform
The National Water Initiative (NWI) is Australia’s blueprint for national water reform. It builds on the Council of Australian Governments’ water reform framework, established in 1994. Water for the Future is a significant investment in delivering the NWI and is underpinned by legislation and institutional reform. This is accelerating the implementation of key water reform objectives, including:

- enhancing water markets and reducing impediments to water trading
- reducing over-allocation of water, particularly in the Murray–Darling Basin
- implementing best practice water pricing
- returning water to the environment to improve the health of river systems
- improving water resources management and planning via access to better water information.

The Bureau’s water information role
Water information is collected and reported by more than 200 organisations across Australia, using a variety of methods. In the past, the range of collection and reporting methods and arrangements for accessing water information made it difficult to monitor the status and use of Australia’s water resources and reliably forecast water availability. This compromised the effectiveness of water resources management and planning.

The Bureau of Meteorology is responsible for compiling and delivering comprehensive water information across the water sector as part of Water for the Future. This is being delivered through the ten-year Improving Water Information Program which monitors, assesses and forecasts the availability, condition and use of our water resources. The Bureau is working with water managers across Australia to make high quality, national water information available to government, industry and the community.

The Water Act 2007
The Water Act gives the Bureau specific water information powers and obligations in addition to its weather and climate functions under the Meteorology Act 1955.

The Bureau’s water information statutory functions include:

- collecting, interpreting and disseminating water information
- conducting regular national water resources assessments
- publishing an annual National Water Account
- providing regular water availability forecasts
- issuing national water information standards
- advising on matters relating to water information
- enhancing understanding of Australia’s water resources.

Functions are listed in the Water Act under Part 7 – Water Information.

Definition of water information
The Water Act defines water information as any raw data or any value added information product that relates to:

(a) the availability, distribution, quantity, quality, use, trading or cost of water; or
(b) water access rights, water delivery rights or irrigation rights

and includes metadata or contextual information relating to water (such as land use information, geological information and ecological information).

Giving water information to the Bureau
Requirements to give water information to the Bureau may be by Regulation (Section 126) or alternatively by written request from the Director of Meteorology (Section 127). In both cases, only information that is in a person’s or organisation’s possession, custody or control must be given.

National Water Information Standards
The Director of Meteorology may, by legislative instrument, issue national water information standards (Section 130). Such standards may deal with all or any of the following:

- collecting water information
- measuring water
- monitoring water
- analysing water
- transmitting water information
- accessing water information
- retaining and storing water information
- water accounting
- reporting water information
- any other matter relating to water information that is specified in the Regulations.
The Act stipulates that the Director of Meteorology must consult with the States and Territories in preparing national water information standards and may undertake other consultation as appropriate (Section 132).

Publishing water accounts and other water information
The Director of Meteorology must publish the National Water Account annually in a form that is readily accessible to the public (Section 122) and may publish any water information that the Bureau holds (Section 123). The Director must not, however, publish water information if he or she believes it would not be in the public interest. Neither can water information be published in a way that identifies an individual's water use unless that information is already published or publicly available.

The Bureau is progressively publishing most of the water information it holds and is making it freely available online through a national water information system called the Australian Water Resources Information System.

We are increasing transparency and understanding of water information to improve the confidence and decision-making capacity of water managers, planners, policy makers and researchers.

Creative Commons
The Creative Commons Attribution Licence is the default licence for all water information products. It permits the broadest reuse of water information, meeting the policy objectives of the Water Act. The Licence ensures that organisations or individuals that supply information are correctly attributed when their information is re-used. This approach aligns with the Australian Government’s Declaration of Open Government, which commits agencies to a culture of openness and recognises that public sector information is a national resource that should be available on the most unrestricted terms wherever possible.

The Water Regulations 2008
Section 256 of the Water Act provides for the making of Regulations to support the Bureau’s water information functions. Section 126 of the Act places an obligation on persons named in the Regulations to give specified water information to the Bureau. The Water Regulations 2008 provide all persons or organisations with a high level of certainty about their obligations to provide water information to the Bureau.

The Regulations came into effect in July 2008. They define who must give specified water information to the Bureau, and the time and format in which it must be supplied. The Regulations name over 200 organisations that are required to give the Bureau specified water information that is in their possession, custody or control.

Water Regulations organisations by State/Territory

- ACT: 2%
- NSW: 30%
- NT: 1%
- QLD: 22%
- SA: 7%
- TAS: 8%
- VIC: 23%
- WA: 7%
- QLD: 22%

Note: Organisations can be listed in one or more categories in the Regulations

Water Regulations organisations by category

- A – Lead water agencies: 28%
- B – Other State/Commonwealth agencies: 5%
- C – Hydroelectricity generators: 2%
- D – Major storage owners or operators: 24%
- E – Rural water utilities: 2%
- F – Urban water utilities: 7%
- G – Catchment management authorities and others: 14%
- H – Flood forecasting and warning water information providers: 3%

Note: Organisations can be listed in one or more categories in the Regulations

For further information
For more information about the Bureau’s water information role, visit our website. Subscribe to our EnGauge newsletter to receive regular water information updates.