

The Water Act 2007 and the Bureau of Meteorology



Australian Government
Bureau of Meteorology

water information

Data ~ Information ~ Insight



This publication outlines the Bureau of Meteorology's new functions and powers under the *Commonwealth Water Act 2007* (the Act), and will be of interest to water data users and managers, including those water data collectors potentially affected by regulations being developed to support the Act.

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 Act and the draft regulations which come under the Act – see www.environment.gov.au/water/action/npws-act07.html

Accelerating national water reform

The National Water Initiative (NWI) is Australia's blueprint for national water reform and builds on the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) framework for water reform established in 1994.

The Australian Government has committed \$10 billion to improve water efficiency and address over-allocation of water resources. This investment, together with the *Commonwealth Water Act 2007* which commenced on 3 March 2008, will accelerate the implementation of the NWI water reform objectives.

The Act assists in implementing many of the elements of the NWI including:

- A water market and trading scheme for the Murray-Darling Basin
- Best practice water pricing
- Working with all parties in the Basin to ensure a balance is kept between all water users, including water to keep wetlands and river systems healthy
- The coordination of data collection and management systems.

Our expanded water information role

Currently water information is collected and stored by more than 200 different organisations across Australia. This makes it difficult to monitor the status and use of Australia's water resources and to forecast water availability reliably. This situation impedes effective water resources management.

Backed by key stakeholders, the *Water Act 2007* and \$450 million over ten years, the Bureau of Meteorology's functions have expanded to include analysing, managing and reporting Australia's water resources information; information that is essential for sound decision-making by governments, business and the community.

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

Our new statutory functions include:

- Issuing national water information standards
- Collecting and publishing water information
- Conducting regular national water resources assessments
- Publishing an annual National Water Account
- Providing regular water availability forecasts
- Giving advice on matters relating to water information
- Enhancing understanding of Australia's water resources

A major outcome of this work will be increased transparency and understanding of water information that will significantly improve the confidence and decision-making capacity of water managers, planners, policy makers and researchers.

The *Water Act 2007* and the Bureau of Meteorology

Water information and the *Water Act 2007*

The Bureau of Meteorology's new water information functions are listed in the Act under *Part 7 – Water Information*. The key features of Part 7 of the Act and the relevant sections are summarised below.

Definition of water information

The *Water Act 2007* 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 contextual information relating to water (such as land use information, geological information and ecological information).

Requesting water information

Requests for water information may be made 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 possession, custody or control must be given. For the time being, only data that is in an electronic format is required.

National Water Information Standards

The Director of Meteorology may, by legislative instrument, issue national water information standards (*Section 130*).

Developing new standards is a major task and we do not envisage issuing any water information standards before 2009. During the coming year we will consult with the water industry and establish expert panels to assist us in developing national water information standards.

The Director of Meteorology must consult with the States in preparing national water information standards and may undertake such other consultation as necessary (*Section 132*).

Under *Section 130* the Act states that the 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
- Any other matter relating to water information that is specified in the regulations.

Publishing water accounts and other water information

The Director of Meteorology must annually publish the National Water Account in a form that is readily accessible to the public (*Section 122*) and may publish any water information that the Bureau holds. 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 which expressly identifies a person's water use unless that information is already published or publicly available (*Section 123*).

The Bureau intends to publish most of the water information it holds and to make it freely available to the public online.



Details about the proposed regulations

Under the Act, the Bureau has the power to make regulations that require specified persons or classes of persons to give water information to the Bureau.

The term *persons*, as used in the draft regulations, includes individuals as well as government agencies, public and private companies and corporations. The proposed regulations are intended to give all persons, affected by the Act, a high level of certainty as to their obligations to provide water information.

The regulations are currently being drafted, following a three-month consultation period. The regulations will prescribe:

- The persons who must give the Bureau a copy of water information they hold
- The kinds of water information to be given to the Bureau
- The time frames and format in which the information must be given to the Bureau

The regulations may come into effect as soon as June 2008. During the following 12 months, persons specified in the regulations will be required to begin giving particular water information to the Bureau in a staged process. From the time when persons have to initially give water information, they will be required to continue providing that information periodically into the future.

In preparation, the Bureau is working with persons who collect water data and will be named in the regulations to ensure they are fully aware of their potential obligations and to assist them to comply with the regulations when they come into effect.

Owners of water data are encouraged to visit our regulations website at www.bom.gov.au/water/regulations. Visitors to the site can subscribe to receive regular email updates.



The Australian Water Resources Information System

To deliver water information to users, we will develop and maintain the Australian Water Resources Information System (AWRIS) – an online information tool that is freely accessible to the public. AWRIS will integrate and add value to extensive measurements of river flows, groundwater levels, reservoir storage volumes, water quality, water use, water entitlements and water trades. AWRIS will be the authoritative repository for water data and reporting in Australia.

The initial development of AWRIS is funded by the National Water Commission's *Raising National Water Standards programme*, and is expected to be completed by the end of 2009. 'Beta' versions of AWRIS will be available for public testing before this date.

AWRIS will improve the quality and value of water information available to governments, business and the community.



For more information

For more information about the *Water Act 2007*, the draft regulations and the Bureau of Meteorology's new water information role please visit our website at www.bom.gov.au/water

Visitors can also subscribe to receive regular email updates.