



The *Water Act 2007* and Water Regulations 2008

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 Water Regulations 2008 available at:
www.bom.gov.au/water/regulations/regulations.php

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 invested \$12.9 billion in *Water for the Future* – a 10 year plan to secure the long-term water supply for all Australians. Underpinned by new legislation and institutional reform, this investment will accelerate the implementation of key NWI 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 expanded water information role

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

The Australian Government has given the Bureau of Meteorology responsibility for compiling and delivering comprehensive water information across the water sector. As part of *Water for the Future*, the Bureau has been allocated \$450 million to administer the *Improving Water Information Program* over ten years to accurately monitor, assess and forecast the availability, condition and use of our water resources. To achieve this, the Bureau is working with water managers across Australia to deliver high quality, national water information to government, industry and the community.

The *Water Act 2007*

The *Water Act 2007*, which came into effect on 3 March 2008, gives the Bureau specific water information powers and obligations in addition to its existing weather and climate functions under the *Meteorology Act 1955*.

Our new statutory functions related to water information 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
- advising on matters relating to water information
- enhancing understanding of Australia's water resources

Functions are listed in the *Water Act 2007* under *Part 7 – Water Information*. Key elements of this part of the *Act* are summarised overleaf.

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.

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www.bom.gov.au/water

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 metadata, 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 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
- 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 necessary (*Section 132*).

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 through a national water information system called the Australian Water Resources Information System (AWRIS) – details of AWRIS are available at: www.bom.gov.au/water/awris.shtml or on our AWRIS fact sheet.

The Water Regulations 2008

Section 126 of the *Water Act 2007* provides for the making of Regulations to support the Bureau's new water information functions. The Water Regulations 2008 provide all persons or organisations, affected by the *Act*, with a high level of certainty about their obligations to provide water information to the Bureau.

The Water Regulations 2008 prescribe:

- organisations that must give the Bureau a copy of specified water information they hold
- types of water information to be given to the Bureau
- timeframes and format in which the information must be given to the Bureau.

The Regulations came into effect on 30 June 2008.

During the following 12 months, organisations specified in the Regulations are required to begin giving specific water information to the Bureau in a staged process. Organisations named under the Regulations will be required to continue providing that information periodically into the future.

The Bureau is working with organisations named in the Regulations to ensure they are fully aware of their obligations and to assist their compliance.

We encourage water data owners to visit the Regulations page on the Bureau's website at www.bom.gov.au/water/regulations, search for their organisation and generate a customised report that lists their reporting responsibilities.

For more information

For more information about the *Water Act 2007*, the Water Regulations 2008 and the Bureau of Meteorology's water information role please visit our website at:

www.bom.gov.au/water

Visitors can also subscribe to receive regular email updates.

Other fact sheets in this series include:

- Transforming Australia's water resources information
- The Australian Water Resources Information System (AWRIS)
- The Water Information Research and Development Alliance (WIRADA)