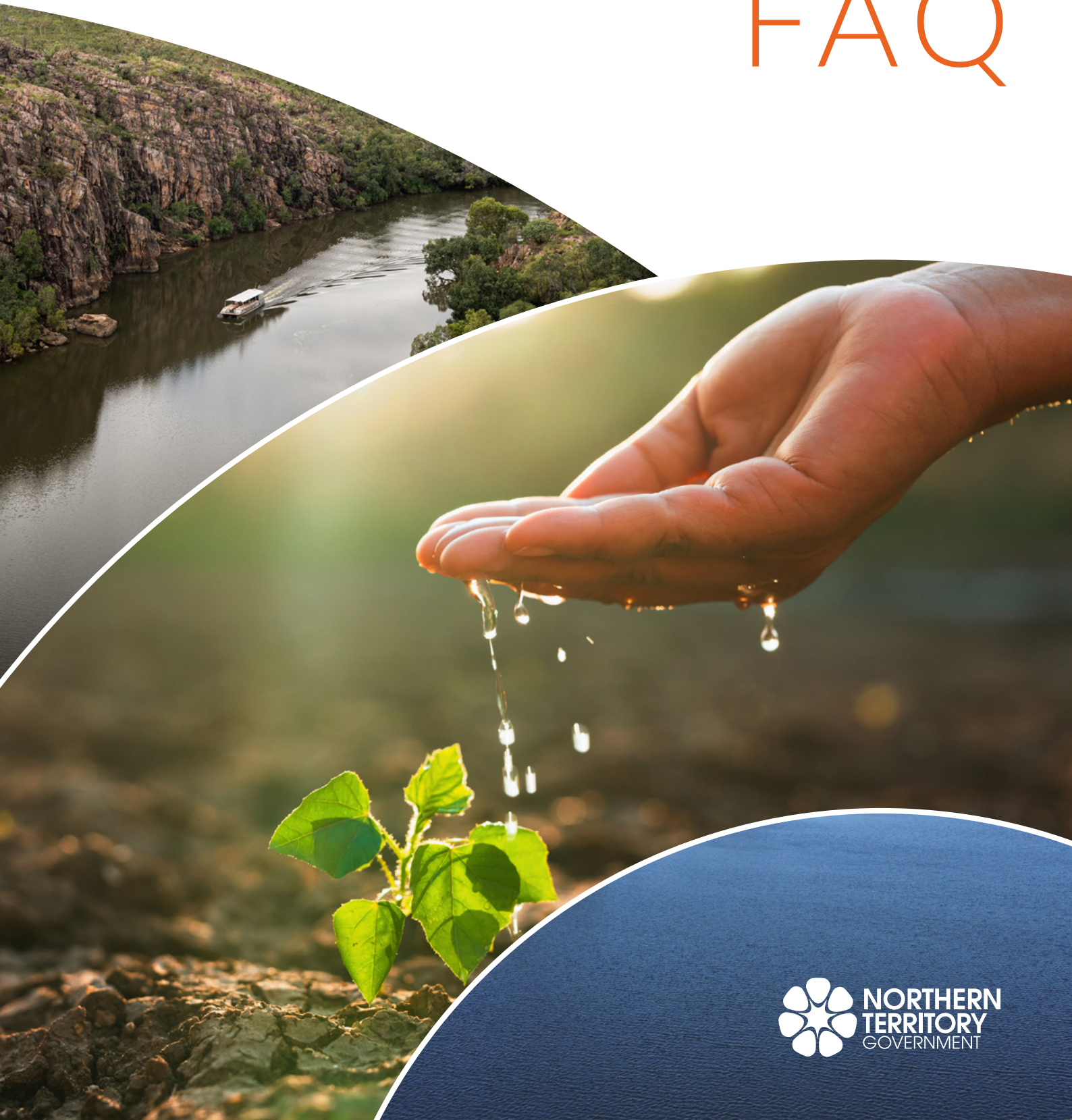


Aboriginal Water Reserves FAQ



What are Aboriginal Water Reserves?

Aboriginal Water Reserves are a portion of water set aside in a water plan for the economic benefit of eligible Aboriginal landowners.

What is a water plan?

A water plan identifies how water is shared for the benefit of the Territory. It specifies the volume of water that can be taken from a water resource and shares that water amongst users whilst protecting the environment.

How do Aboriginal Water Reserves benefit landowners?

Setting aside water in the Aboriginal Water Reserve specifically for eligible Aboriginal landowners creates opportunities for them to access economic benefits whenever the opportunity arises.

Eligible Aboriginal landowners may choose to:

- use the water to grow their own business
- seek an agreement with a third party to use the water in exchange for economic benefit.

Who can access an Aboriginal Water Reserve?

Eligible Aboriginal landowners can access the Aboriginal Water Reserve by applying for a water extraction licence.

Eligible Aboriginal landowners may also establish an agreement with a third party who, with the eligible Aboriginal landowner's consent, can apply for a water extraction licence.

Who are eligible Aboriginal landowners?

Eligible Aboriginal landowners are listed in a water plan. They are the registered owners of land in a water plan area that is:

- identified as either:
 - Aboriginal land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*
 - exclusive possession native title land
 - Aboriginal freehold land
- greater than 1 hectare
- for groundwater resources, the groundwater is beneath the land
- for surface water resources, the surface water is on or immediately adjacent to the land.

How do I know if I have a share of an Aboriginal Water Reserve?

Eligible Aboriginal landowners, and the amount of water set aside for them, are listed in water plans.

If there is a water plan in your area you can read it here: [Water plans](#)

I am an eligible Aboriginal landowner, how do I access my share of an Aboriginal Water Reserve?

To access water in an Aboriginal Water Reserve, you must apply for a water extraction licence through the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment.

You can read more information about how to apply for a licence here:

[Apply for a water extraction licence](#)

You can also email water.licensing@nt.gov.au or contact your local Department of Lands, Planning and Environment office.

What if there is no water plan with an Aboriginal Water Reserve in my area?

You can still apply for a water extraction licence through the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment office.





How are Aboriginal Water Reserves determined?

Aboriginal Water Reserves are determined during the development of a water plan, based on the area of eligible land within a water plan area and the volume of water available.

Water plans set how much water:

- stays in the environment
- is available for use
- is set aside for the Aboriginal Water Reserve.

You can read more about water plans here: [Water plans](#)

How much water is set aside for an Aboriginal Water Reserve?

The amount of water set aside for an Aboriginal Water Reserve depends on how much eligible land there is within the water plan and how much water is available to use.

A water plan can set aside up to 30 per cent of the water for economic use to Aboriginal Water Reserves.

You can read more about water plans in your area here: [Water plans](#)

How can industry access this water?

To access water in an Aboriginal Water Reserve, you must apply for a water extraction licence through the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment.

Industry must have an agreement with an eligible Aboriginal landowner to apply for a water extraction licence from the Aboriginal Water Reserve.

You can read more information about how to apply for a licence here:

[Apply for a water extraction licence](#)

You can also email water.licensing@nt.gov.au or contact your local Department of Lands, Planning and Environment office.

How do I contact eligible Aboriginal landowners if I would like to establish an agreement?

Eligible Aboriginal landowners are listed in water plans and may be contacted through the relevant land council or Aboriginal corporation.

Water plans are available here:

[Water plans](#)

What law manages Aboriginal Water Reserves?

Aboriginal Water Reserves have been around since 2017 through Northern Territory Government policy.

In 2020, Aboriginal Water Reserves were introduced to the *Water Act 1992*. Since then, water plans have been required to set aside water for an Aboriginal Water Reserve.

In 2025, changes were made to the *Water Act 1992* through the *Water Amendment (Aboriginal Water Reserves) Bill 2025*. This makes it easier for eligible Aboriginal landowners to access Aboriginal Water Reserves.

The changes help eligible Aboriginal landowners apply for a water extraction licence to access an Aboriginal Water Reserve. The changes also give eligible Aboriginal landowners the right to make decisions about who can apply for a licence to take their share of the Aboriginal Water Reserve.

Who do I contact for more information?

Contact your local Department of Lands, Planning and Environment office via the details below or email water.licensing@nt.gov.au

Region	Address	Phone	Mail
Darwin	Level 3 Goyder Centre Chung Wah Terrace Palmerston NT 0830	08 8999 4455	PO Box 496 Palmerston NT 0831
Katherine	First Floor Big Rivers Government Centre 5 First Street Katherine NT 0850	08 8973 8831	PO Box 2390 Katherine NT 0851
Alice Springs	First Floor Tom Hare Building Arid Zone Research Institute Stuart Highway South Alice Springs NT 0871	08 8951 9215	PO Box 1120 Alice Springs NT 0871

LINKS



Apply for a water extraction licence:
[nt.gov.au/environment/water/licensing/water-extraction-licence/
apply-for-a-water-extraction-licence](https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/licensing/water-extraction-licence/apply-for-a-water-extraction-licence)



Water plans:
[nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/
water-allocation/water-allocation-plans](https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-allocation/water-allocation-plans)

