

# Big Rivers Region: water availability update - February 2026

This Early Notice provides an outlook of water availability for the upcoming water accounting year, 1 May 2026 to 30 April 2027 (2026-27). This notice is part of the department's commitment to providing timely information to water licence holders.

## Key findings

Early indications are that water licence allocations are likely to be 100% for the Katherine and Roper regions, specifically the following water resources:

- Katherine Tindall Limestone
- Mataranka Tindall Limestone
- Tindall Limestone aquifer (Flora)
- Jinduckin Formation
- Edith River
- Katherine River upstream of Tindall Limestone Aquifer Donkey Camp Weir
- Ooloo Dolostone.

## Formal notification

The Controller of Water Resources will formally notify licence holders of their 2026-27 licence allocation before 1 May 2026. This is in line with the terms and conditions on all water extraction licences in the Top End.

## Technical summary

Water Resources collects a large amount of water resource information, including rainfall, river flows, groundwater levels and water use. This data is analysed and modelled, to predict the water resource response to extraction over the coming year. Water licences are managed to meet specific environmental river flows that are set in regional water plans, such as the Mataranka water plan, and the Katherine water plan.

## Rainfall to 31 January 2026

January had significantly higher rainfall than the long-term median across the Katherine River and broader Douglas-Daly catchment areas. Both Katherine and Douglas areas received more than 100 mm above the median rainfall for their respective areas.

The Bureau of Meteorology climate outlook predicts rainfall as likely to be average for the region for the rest of February, March and April 2026. If this happens, the wet season rain for 2025-26 would be approximately equal to or above the long-term median.

The Roper catchment recorded slightly below median rainfall during January 2026. The climate outlook for the Roper catchment predicts average rainfall for the rest of February, March and April 2026. If this happens, the 2025-26 wet season is expected to be approximately equal to the long-term median.

## Groundwater

Monitoring results for the Tindall Limestone aquifer levels in October 2025 (end of the 2025 dry season) identified an increase in water levels compared with the same time last year. This is likely due to increased recharge resulting from above average rainfall in the 2024-25 wet season. The Mataranka Limestone aquifer levels in October 2025 were similar to the previous year.

## 2025-26 water licensing outlook

Modelling scenarios, which factor rainfall, groundwater recharge, and extraction (including rural stock and domestic use, and assuming 100% of water licences are used) were run in early February 2026 to predict the flows in the Katherine, Daly and Roper Rivers at the end of the dry season, assuming no further rainfall occurs for the remainder of 2026.

Modelling scenarios indicate that allocations in all areas are likely to be 100%

Each regional scenario is discussed below.

### Katherine River

Modelling indicates the systems is in an 'average' river flow scenario (natural flow 2.4 m<sup>3</sup>/s at Wilden on 1 November 2026), which requires that 70% of river flows be reserved for the environment, with 30% of river flow available for extraction.

Modelling that included extraction predicted a 20.8% reduction in flows, which means the water licence allocations in this area are likely to be 100%

### Daly River

The environmental flow requirements in this area are important for the protection of the pig-nosed turtle, an internationally endangered species (ICUN 2018), with the Daly River identified as having the largest, least impacted and most significant population of the species.

Modelling indicates that the predicted flows at upper and lower Daly will meet the environmental flow requirements, although flows in the mid-Daly may not. However, the mid-Daly flows have been identified as being consistently under-represented in modelling results, and as such, the results at this location are considered to be within the margin of error. Water licence allocations in this area are likely to be 100%.

### Roper River

The Mataranka water plan sets out the minimum flows associated with wet, average and dry climatic conditions. The water plan requires that any reduction in flow associated with extraction must not cause the river flow to fall into a lower climatic condition.

Modelled predictions in the Roper River for 2026 indicate that the river is in a wet climatic condition (natural flow at 340 ML per day on 1 November 2026), and that extraction will not impact this rating. As a result, water licence allocations in this area are likely to be 100%