

Department of Lands, Planning and Environment

Managing water in and around Katherine

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Managing water in and around Katherine



A plan for the Katherine region

A water allocation plan (plan) has been developed for the Katherine region. The plan manages groundwater of the Tindall Limestone Aquifer (TLA), and dry season river flows from the Katherine River, known collectively as the **Katherine water resource**.

The plan was declared on 11 August 2026 for a period of 10 years, and it is the fifth Katherine water plan.



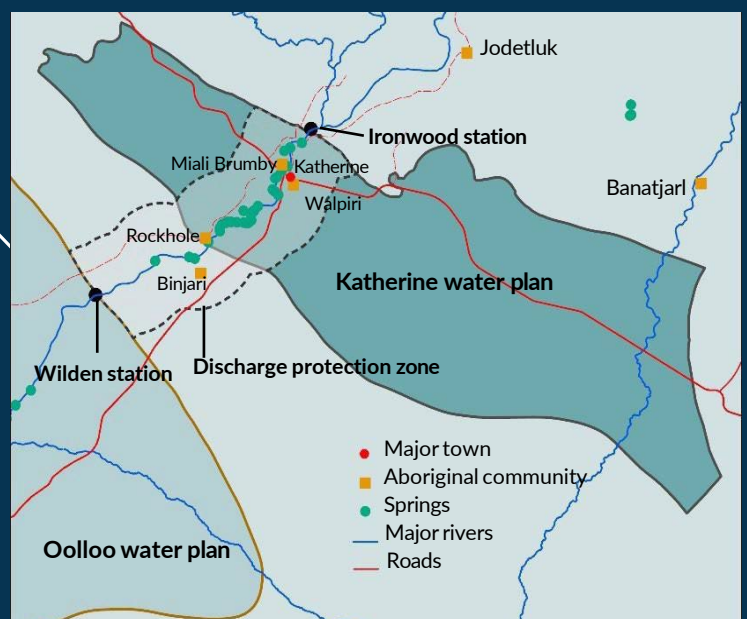
Where is the Katherine water plan area?

The Katherine plan area covers 1,176 km² and is about 300 km south of Darwin. It includes the town of Katherine and the Rockhole community.

Katherine is the Northern Territory's third largest town and is expected to grow. As population and economic activity increase, it is important to secure water supplies for the different uses and values that depend on it.

The TLA is the most productive groundwater system in the plan area. It forms a part of the larger Cambrian Limestone Aquifer and helps maintain flow in the Katherine River during the dry season. The plan also manages surface water extraction from the Katherine River up to the Ooloo plan boundary.

Water in this area supports people's livelihoods, community wellbeing, recreation, and holds cultural importance for Aboriginal people in the region. The Katherine water resource continues to be a secure and sustainable source of good quality water.



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How was the Katherine water plan developed?

The Katherine water plan was informed by:

- 70 years of water monitoring data
- Scientific studies, including [Katherine Tindall Limestone Water Allocation Plan science report](#)¹
- Input from the [Daly River water advisory committee](#)²
- Community consultation, including targeted stakeholder engagement and a 4-week public comment period (Oct-Nov 2025)

How is water shared under the plan?

Water is shared between the environment and [water users](#)³. Before water is allocated under the estimated sustainable yield (ESY), enough water is preserved for environment. This prioritises and protects both the environment and Territory lifestyle.

The plan allows 39,000 ML per year to be extracted by water users across the Katherine region.

Extracted water is shared between users including:

- 2,700 ML for rural stock and domestic uses
- 4,000 ML for public water supply
- 3,220 ML for the Aboriginal water reserve
- 28,980 ML for economic development
- 100 ML for the environment. This volume is allocated to meet the requirement under s22B(6) of the Water Act 1992. This is in addition to the environmental allocation set outside of ESY.

Is there water available for a new licence?

Yes, there is water available for economic development. There are three ways to [apply for water](#)⁴:

- apply for a new licence from the general pool.
- apply for a new licence from the Aboriginal water reserve.
- [trade water](#)⁵ with an existing licence holder within the Katherine water resource.

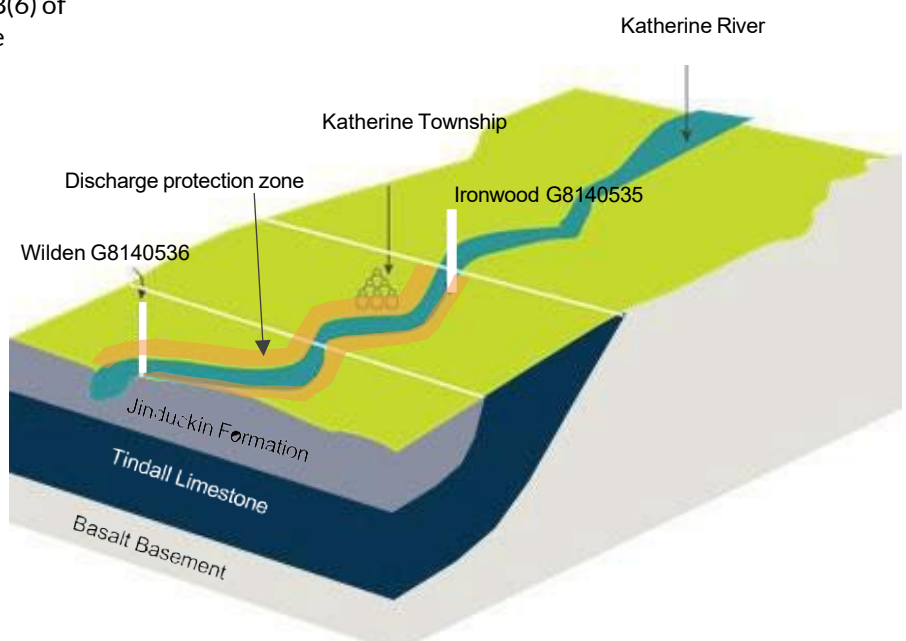
What is an Aboriginal water reserve?

An [Aboriginal water reserve](#)⁶ is a specific portion of water set aside for Aboriginal people to use water for economic development. The Aboriginal water reserve is only accessible to eligible Aboriginal people to use themselves or trade. The Katherine plan sets aside 3,220 ML per year for the Aboriginal water reserve.

How does the plan protect the Katherine River and springs?

The plan protects and manages groundwater that supports baseflows in the Katherine River during the dry season. It does this by:

- setting an ESY that ensures overall water extraction has minimal impact on the flow of the Katherine River.
- applying [announced allocations](#)⁷ to reduce water extraction during very dry years to maintain dry-season river flows.
- implementing a 'discharge protection zone' to cap commercial water use to 13,816 ML/year close to the river. New licences and permanent trades will not be granted if they cause the total entitlement to exceed the cap.
- 17 implementation actions will improve management over time, including commitment to an independent study to improve residential water use estimates and enhancing public reporting of unlicensed extraction.



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Is there science to support the plan?

Northern Territory Government water scientists have been studying the Katherine region since the 1960s. The Katherine TLA is one of the best studied water resources in the Northern Territory. The Department of Lands, Planning and Environment has high confidence in its understanding of aquifer characteristics through extensive exploratory drilling, satellite data, historical monitoring, geological mapping, research and modelling.

The department has a continuous groundwater and river level monitoring program in the plan area. Data collected is available on the [department's Water Data Portal](#)⁸. This real world data has informed a [water model](#)⁹ which has helped water scientists to understand the system and to predict how the water resource might respond to changes like water extraction and different future rainfall scenarios. Several studies also informed the plan, as summarised in the plan's background report. [Find out more about the scientific inputs for the water plan](#).

Why has the plan boundary changed?

This iteration of the Katherine plan manages the portion of the TLA which has strong connection to the Katherine River, aiming for more efficient management and better alignment with hydrogeology and water use patterns. The plan will continue to manage surface water extraction from the Katherine River up to the Ooloo plan boundary.

Although the plan boundary has been reduced, 98% of the TLA licensed bores and surface water licences that were inside the previous boundary still lie within the new water plan area. It includes the section of the TLA that is directly connected to springs.

How was the community involved in the plan's development?

The [Daly River Water Advisory Committee](#)² was established in November 2024. The committee represents agricultural, tourism, Aboriginal, recreational fishing and community interests. Over five WAC meetings and several out-of-session meetings, the committee played an active role in reflecting community values and shaping the plan objectives. The committee also provided formal advice to the Minister on the draft plan for public consultation and the final plan for declaration, and will continue to advise the department during implementation of the plan.

A draft plan was released for public consultation to ensure the community had the opportunity to have a say. Feedback received during the consultation was considered in the final plan. Find out more about stakeholder feedback in the [consultation summary](#)¹⁰.

Find out more

You can read more about the Katherine plan including the plan, the background report and the implementation actions via: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-plan/water-control-districts/daly-roper-beetaloo/katherine-water-allocation-plan>

1. Science Report: <https://territorystories.nt.gov.au/10070/986726>
2. Daly River Water Advisory Committee: <https://environment.nt.gov.au/boards-committees/water-advisory-committees/daly-river-water-advisory-committee>
3. Managing Water in the Territory: https://nt.gov.au/_media/docs/environment/water/licensing-and-permits/water-resource-management-statement-managing-water-in-the-territory.pdf
4. Applying for a Water Extraction Licence: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/licensing/water-extraction-licence/apply-for-a-water-extraction-licence>
5. Trading Water: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/licensing/water-extraction-licence/water-trading>
6. Aboriginal Water Reserves: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-allocation/aboriginal-water-reserves>
7. Announced Allocations: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-plan/announced-water-allocations>
8. Water Data Portal: <https://ntg.aquaticinformatics.net/>
9. Water Modelling: https://nt.gov.au/_media/docs/environment/water/licensing-and-permits/water-resource-management-statement-water-modelling.pdf
10. Consultation Report: https://nt.gov.au/_media/docs/environment/water/water-management/announced-water-allocations/katherine-water-allocation-plan/katherine-water-plan-consultation-summary.pdf