

Managing water in and around Alice Springs



**FREQUENTLY ASKED
QUESTIONS**

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A new plan for the Alice Springs region

A water allocation plan (plan) has been developed for the Alice Springs region. The plan was declared on 5 August 2026 for a period of 10 years.

Where is the Alice Springs water plan area?

The Alice Springs plan area is located around Alice Springs and covers 4,528km².

The water plan has been divided into five water management zones to reflect the different water resource characteristics of each area.

The 5 zones are:

- Mereenie
- Town
- Inner Farm
- Outer Farm
- Wanngardi

Find out more about [setting management boundaries](#)¹

How is water shared under the water plan?

Water is shared between the environment and water users.

The plan allows 23,540 ML per year to be extracted by water users across the Alice Springs region. Each management zone has its own estimated sustainable yield.

Extracted water is shared between:

- 13,000 ML for public water supply
- 1,840 ML for rural stock and domestic use
- 1,170 ML for the Aboriginal water reserve
- 6,910 ML for other users (cultural uses, economic development)

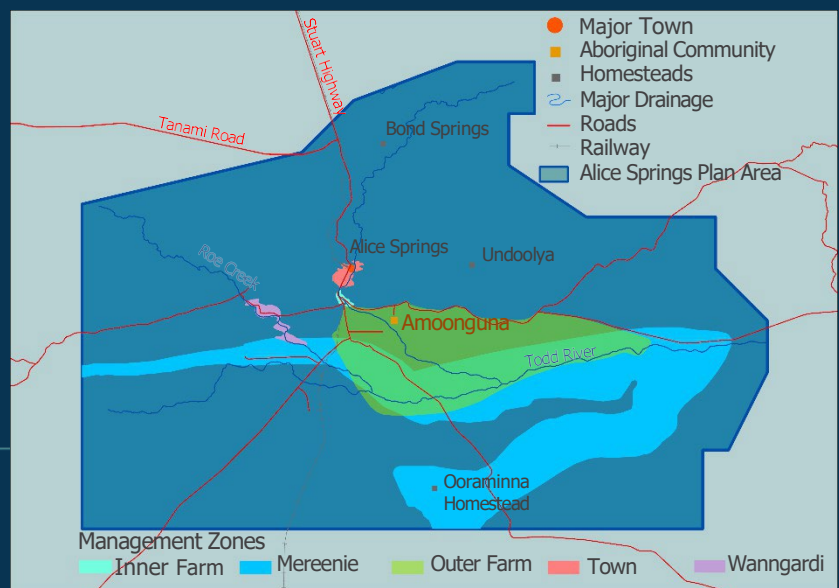
Is there water available for a new licence?

Yes. In the Mereenie and Inner Farm management zones there are 3 ways to access water:

1. [apply for a new licence from the general pool](#)²
2. apply for a new licence from the Aboriginal water reserve.
3. [trade water with an existing licence holder](#)³

In the Wanngardi and Outer Farm management zones, water is only available through a water trade with an existing licence holder.

In the Town management zone, water is available through a water trade with an existing licence holder or applying for a new licence from the Aboriginal water reserve.



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How are Aboriginal interests considered in the plan?

Ongoing participation of Aboriginal people and interests are a key focus of the implementation actions to ensure the water plan is adequately protecting and preserving Aboriginal interests in the plan area.

Why was the plan updated?

There have been multiple plans for Alice Springs, with the first being declared in 2007. The previous plan expired on 15 February 2026. With an improved understanding of the water resources and demands in the plan area, the new plan has been declared.

The plan integrates some recommendations from the 2021 review of the 2016–2026 plan. The plan reflects minimal changes to development and extraction forecasts for the plan area.

The Plan has been streamlined into five management zones. Estimated Sustainable Yields (ESY) account for a volume to the environment, rural stock and domestic use and an allocation to the Aboriginal Water Reserve. The plan provides certainty by declaring the plan for its maximum possible term, and provisions the Aboriginal water reserve in two management zones.

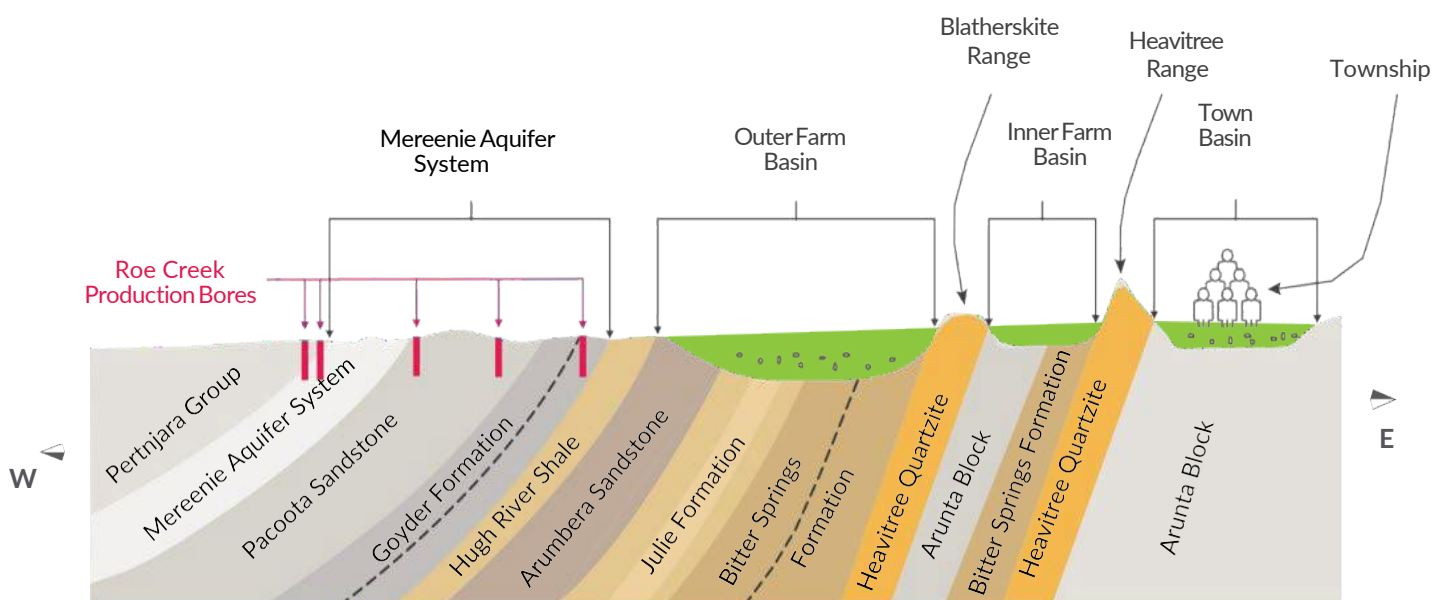
What is an Aboriginal water reserve?

An [Aboriginal water reserve](#)⁴ is a specific portion of water set aside for local Aboriginal people to use for economic development. The Aboriginal water reserve is only accessible to eligible Aboriginal people to use themselves or to trade. The Alice Springs plan makes 1,038 ML per year available for the Aboriginal water reserve. Through the life of this plan, the volume could increase up to 1,170 ML per year.

Is there science to support the plan?

The plan is informed by the best available science for the region. The Northern Territory Government water scientists have studied the water systems in Alice Springs for over 70 years. There is an extensive understanding of the Alice Springs aquifer systems, particularly in areas of high demand such as the Mereenie Aquifer System. Data is gathered from 38 monitoring sites including 30 bores and 8 surface water sites in the plan area.

You can read more about the scientific inputs for the water plan in the background report.



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How does the plan protect trees that depend on groundwater?

Shallow sandy aquifers supporting river red gums, coolabahs and other groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs) are protected through limits of acceptable change. The plan includes considerations that can be incorporated into water extraction licences to assist in the management of groundwater levels should they reduce to below 8 metres below ground level in the Todd River corridor within the Town Basin.

Further work through the plan's Implementation Actions will identify and justify appropriate depth-to-water thresholds for all basins.



Will the plan address water quality?

The Aquifer Protection Study, co-funded by the National Water Grid, will be implemented under the plan to inform where future development is of least risk to aquifers and the environment.

Find out more

You can read more about the Alice Springs 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/alice-springs/alice-springs-water-allocation-plan>

Information on other topics talked about in these FAQs include:

- 1 Setting management boundaries - <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-policies-and-guidelines>
- 2 Applying for a licence - <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/licensing/water-extraction-licence/apply-for-a-water-extraction-licence>
- 3 Trading water - <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/licensing/water-extraction-licence/water-trading>
- 4 Aboriginal water reserves - <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-plan/aboriginal-water-reserves>