



Managing water in and around Mataranka

Frequently asked questions

Managing water in and around Mataranka

A water plan for the Mataranka region

A **water allocation plan** (water plan) has been developed for the Mataranka region. The plan manages groundwater connected to the Roper River. The plan was declared by the Minister for Water Resources in December 2024 for a period of 10 years.

Where is the Mataranka water plan area?

The Mataranka water plan area is approximately 100 km south of Katherine. It covers approximately 9,282 km² and stretches about 190 km from north to south, and about 70 km from east to west.

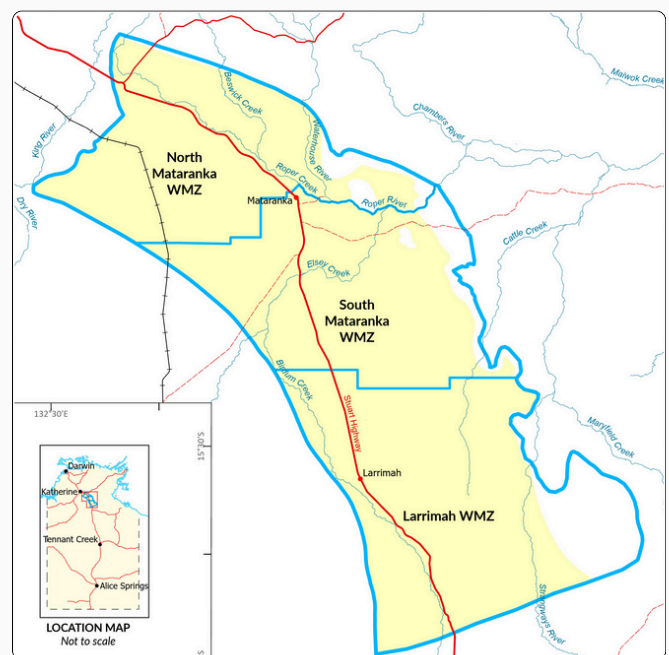
The Mataranka plan manages groundwater in the Tindall Limestone Aquifer, which provides the majority of the dry season flows to the Roper River, the Territory's second largest river. Rainbow, Mataranka and Bitter Springs are also fed from the aquifer. They are all protected by the plan.

The Mataranka region has been divided into 3 water management zones to reflect the different climatic, environmental and water resource characteristics of each area.

The 3 zones are:

- North Mataranka
- South Mataranka
- Larrimah.

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



Managing water in and around Mataranka

How is water shared under the water plan?

Water is shared firstly between the environment and water users, with the water plan preserving more than 90 percent of the dry season flows to the Roper River, and 97 percent of water that flows into the iconic springs in the region. This prioritises and protects both the environment and Territory lifestyle.

The water plan allows 62,474 ML per year to be extracted by water users across the Mataranka region.

This water is shared among different uses including:

- 732 ML for rural stock and domestic uses
- 513 ML for public water supply
- 4,574 ML for the Aboriginal water reserve
- 56,625 ML for other consumptive uses (agriculture, aquaculture, cultural, industry, mining and petroleum).



Is there water available for a new licence?

Yes. Depending on the location, there are different ways to apply for water:

1. In North Mataranka and South Mataranka - apply for a new licence from the Aboriginal water reserve.
2. In the Larrimah zone - apply for a new licence from the Aboriginal water reserve or from the general pool.
3. In any water management zone - trade water with an existing licence holder.

Managing water in and around Mataranka

What is an Aboriginal water reserve?

An Aboriginal water reserve is a specific portion of water set aside to help Aboriginal people use water for economic development. The Aboriginal water reserve is only accessible to eligible Aboriginal people. Eligible Aboriginal people can use it themselves or trade it.

The Mataranka water plan sets aside 4,574 ML per year for the Aboriginal water reserve. Through the life of the plan this could increase up to 11,171 ML per year.

How does the plan protect the Roper River and springs?

The plan specifically protects and manages groundwater that provides the base flows to the Roper River and its system of springs and creeks during the dry season.

The estimated sustainable yield ensures that overall water extraction has minimal impact on the Roper River and springs. The plan adds additional protections in North Mataranka and South Mataranka including:

- Announced allocations which enable water licences to be adjusted on a yearly basis, depending on weather and climate events.
- No new licences in North Mataranka and South Mataranka limiting development to current levels in these sensitive areas.



Managing water in and around Mataranka

Is there science to support the plan?

Northern Territory Government water scientists have been studying the Mataranka region since the 1960s. This includes gathering data from 53 groundwater and surface water monitoring sites in the area.

This real world data has informed a water model that has been developed for the area. The model has helped water scientists to understand the natural water balance and to predict how the water resource might respond to change, such as water extraction or under different rainfall scenarios.

Major studies also informed the plan as summarised in the plan's background report. This includes research from the Strategic Regional Environmental Baseline Assessment (SREBA) project and the CSIRO Roper River water resource assessment.

Find out more about the scientific inputs for the water plan.

How are Aboriginal interests considered in the plan?

The Wubalawun, Yangman, Mangarrayi and Jawoyn people have deep spiritual connection with the region's many springs, soaks, billabongs, creeks, rivers and landscapes. This extends to cultural values where water flows downstream along the Roper River.

The water plan included some input from local Aboriginal people but more is needed. Ongoing participation of Aboriginal people is a key focus of the Implementation Actions to ensure the water plan is adequately protecting and preserving cultural heritage in the catchment area.

How was the Mataranka water plan developed?

The Mataranka water plan was informed by:

- historical water monitoring data
- scientific studies, including the SREBA and Roper River water resource assessment
- water advisory committee
- community consultation.

The draft plan was released for public consultation in early 2024 to ensure the community had the opportunity to have a say. Feedback received during consultation was considered when the final plan was developed and submitted to the Minister.

Managing water in and around Mataranka

Find out more

You can read more about the Mataranka water plan including the water plan itself, the background report and the implementation actions via nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-control-districts/daly-roper-beetaloo/mataranka-water-allocation-plan.

Information on other topics talked about in these FAQs include:

Setting management boundaries - nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1456561/water-resource-management-statement-setting-managament-boundaries.pdf.

Applying for a licence - nt.gov.au/environment/water/licensing/water-extraction-licence/apply-for-a-water-extraction-licence.

Trading water - nt.gov.au/environment/water/licensing/water-extraction-licence/water-trading.

Aboriginal water reserves - nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-allocation/aboriginal-water-reserves.

Announced allocations - nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-allocation-plans/announced-water-allocations.

Water modelling - nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1456562/water-resource-management-statement-water-modelling.pdf.

Strategic Regional Environmental Baseline Assessment (SREBA) project - environment.nt.gov.au/onshore-gas/sreba/sreba-for-the-beetaloo-sub-basin.

CSIRO Roper River water resource assessment - www.csiro.au/en/research/natural-environment/water/water-resource-assessment/roper-river-water-resource-assessment.

Scientific inputs - nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1470444/mataranka-background-report-2024-2034.PDF.