

Department of LANDS, PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

REPORT CARD Compliance and enforcement priorities 2024-25



Water Resources Division



About compliance and enforcement

Water is a critical component and driver of economic growth in the Territory. The misuse of water can have implications on the economy, the environment, cultural sites and other water users.

The Controller of Water Resources (Controller) is responsible for the regulation of water extraction in the Northern Territory. Water Resources supports the Controller in administering these duties, including ensuring compliance with the *Water Act 1992* and *Water Regulations 1992*. Some activities include monitoring compliance with water extraction licences, permits to interfere with waterways, bore work permits and driller licences.

This report card is a snapshot of the activities and outcomes achieved in 2024–25.

Compliance and enforcement priorities 2021–26

Lists broad issues fundamental to the management of water resources under the Act. The priorities give Water Resources Division consistent direction for the medium term (5 years).

Compliance plan

An annual plan outlining specific activities, targets and performance outcomes to help Water Resources Division increase compliance and progress the priorities over 12 months.

Compliance report card

A snapshot of the progress against the priorities and plan over 12 months.



Priority 1: Measuring and reporting water use

Conduct audits of: meter reading submissions; water usage; compliance with special conditions

Meter reading submissions

In total, 8,079 meter readings were received in the 2024–25 financial year, with 42% of those readings submitted by licence holders via the MyMeter online dashboard. Most readings were accurately reported. Inaccuracies are generally a result of error by the licence holder when entering the data into the MyMeter online dashboard. These discrepancies are usually obvious and are corrected by Water Resources in consultation with the licence holder when identified.

Meter reading submission audits were undertaken in the quarters ending September, December, March and June. The audits focused on addressing long term non-compliance with water use reporting conditions by identifying licences that had not submitted meter readings over the preceding three consecutive months.

The audits conducted in quarters ending December and June focused on all licences held for the beneficial uses of mining activity or petroleum activity, as well as all other licences with an entitlement over 100 ML per year.

Audits conducted in quarters ending September and March included all licence holders that hadn't reported within the preceding three months.

Across all audits utilising the above parameters, between 91% and 98% of licences were deemed to be compliant with reporting conditions, an average of 95% over the year.

Water Resources carried out investigations into non-compliant licence holders identified in the audit, and regulatory outcomes were determined. The regulatory outcomes included: no further action, compliance advice (education), warning letter, direction notice, licence amendment or infringement notice.

No further action was taken on licences where a change of property ownership had just occurred or in some cases where there had been no water extraction.

From the meter report audits, 10 warning letters, 4 infringements and one direction notice were issued in 2024–25.

✓ TARGET (MET)

The target of 95% of licence holders reporting their water use has been met.

Water usage

Water usage was monitored regularly throughout 2024–25. Early engagement occurred with licence holders about their water use through the provision of mid-year water updates. Licence holders were informed of their water usage and put on notice if the trend indicated that they may need to take action to avoid exceeding their water entitlement.

Investigations were carried out where the reports showed that the maximum annual entitlement had been exceeded. Just under 3% of licence holders exceeded their water entitlements. Over the financial year, one infringement and 2 warning letters were issued. One investigation into a suspected exceedance of a maximum licence entitlement is ongoing and not yet finalised.

Extraction points equipped with meters

By the end of the 2024–25 financial year, 93% of licences had at least one licensed extraction point fitted with a meter which is a 1% increase from the previous financial year.

There are a total of 1,185 licensed extraction points, 89% of which are fitted with a meter, which is narrowly under the target of 90%.

Engagement with licence holders will continue in 2025–26 to further improve compliance.

○ TARGET (NOT MET)

The target of 90% of licensed bores being metered has not been met.

Compliance with special conditions

As of 30 June 2025, there were 58 water extraction licences with special conditions. The nature of the special conditions vary between the licences.

In July each year, an audit is conducted of the 17 licences that are required through a special condition to provide an annual report to the department. The audit for the last financial year indicated that 15 licences were compliant with their condition to provide a report. The department is investigating the two licence holders that have not supplied annual reports.

A target for the 2025–26 financial year is to improve compliance of the licences with special conditions following audits.

✓ TARGET (MET)

The target to conduct an annual audit of licences with special conditions was achieved.

Review and update the Northern Territory Non-urban Water Metering Code of Practice

A review of the current Northern Territory Non-urban Water Metering Code of Practice (NT Code of Practice) is ongoing and improvements have been made to make the document contemporary, fit for purpose and suitable to meet water regulation requirements.

The review of the NT Code of Practice is informed by the department's involvement in the review and update of the national Metrological Assurance Framework (MAF2), which provides a uniform compliance management approach for non-urban water meters across all jurisdictions.

The updated NT Code of Practice will be finalised in Q1 2026, following the completion of the MAF2 review.



Priority 2: Registering bores and statement of bores

Disseminate a public facing document concerning the obligations of a bore work permit holder

Water Resources has been involved in the department's 'Know Your Bore' education campaign, which shares information with the public about a variety of themes related to water extraction bores.

The permit and approval requirements for bore construction in the Northern Territory and obligations of a bore work permit holder are part of the education campaign.

The information is provided to the public through fact sheets, flyers, animations and podcasts. The campaign is presently underway and information is available online.

Audit the correct completion and submission timeframes of statement of bores

In the 2024–25 year it was found that 217 bores were drilled under bore work permits and 235 were drilled in areas where bore work permits are not required.

Of all submitted statements of bores, 69% were submitted within 28 days, an increase from 52% in 2023–24, however the 90% compliance plan target was not met.

A targeted engagement strategy aimed at improving compliance with the reporting obligations under driller licences is planned for the 2025–26 financial year.

○ TARGET (NOT MET)

The target of 90% of statement of bores submitted within 28 days was not met.

Carry out site inspections of constructed bores in a water control district

Bore work permits regulate site specific requirements for bore construction. Permits help protect aquifers and water users from pollution and other risks. Bore work permits are issued within water control districts. Permits are not required outside of a water control district unless the bore is for the purpose of mining or petroleum activity.

✓ TARGET (MET)

A target of inspecting the completed construction of 10 bores within water control districts was met. The target was set with the intent of determining compliance rates with the conditions of bore work permits. The inspections were carried out in the Darwin Rural Adelaide River and Daly Roper Beetaloo water control districts where bores had been constructed by various drillers. In all 10 inspections, the permit holders were found to be compliant with the conditions of their bore work permit.



Priority 3: Unlawful water extraction

Commence evidence gathering of locations where suspected unlawful water extraction is occurring in the Darwin Rural area

The department continued its focus of identifying potential unauthorised water use in the former Darwin Rural water control district. A total of 84 properties were identified for further inspection through remote data analysis, ground truthing via site verification and engagement with property owners.

Through engagement and site verification, 57 of the 84 identified properties were confirmed to not require a licence.

Most of the remaining properties were found to be eligible for licensing through the streamlined process for existing water use that was previously exempt from licensing in the Darwin Rural area. These properties are now licensed or in the process of obtaining their water licence. Some properties were found to be ineligible for a water licence or did not submit an application under the streamlined process. Investigations will commence in circumstances where property owners are extracting water unlawfully and unwilling to enter the licensing framework.

The streamlined licensing period for the former Darwin Rural water control district ended on 31 July 2025. The focus for 2025–26 is on the Adelaide River area, where existing water users who were previously exempt from licensing have until 30 July 2026 to apply for a licence.

The department received three reports, from members of the public, regarding unlawful water extraction in the Darwin Rural area. Reports were investigated and all three water users have been transitioned into the licensing framework through the streamlined process or where water was available, through the standard licence process.

The department did not receive any reports of unlawful water extraction outside of the Darwin Rural area.

Update the department website to include and explain evidence gathering methods used by water regulation officers to assess unlawful water extraction

Further information has been developed for the department's website to increase public awareness about the offences under the *Water Act 1992*.

The website has been updated to include information about taking water without authorisation, how the department is presently identifying unauthorised water use, and what powers and enforcement options are provided under the *Water Act 1992*.



Priority 4: Recovery of unused water

Run two regional campaigns to apply the recovery of unused water policy to the selected area

Where licence holders consistently underutilise a large proportion of their licence entitlements, water can be recovered for allocation to other uses through the Recovery of Unused Licensed Water Entitlements Policy (recovery policy).

In late 2024, all licences within the Ti Tree water allocation plan area were considered under the recovery policy. Following a review of the licences, recovery procedures were not commenced in the plan area as the volume of water that could be recovered in accordance with the policy was insignificant.

A regional campaign commenced during the 2024–25 period which is still underway, is to assess unused water licence entitlements in the Berry Springs Water Allocation Plan area. Thirty-eight licences were considered under the policy. Seven licences were deemed suitable for further consideration and the licence holders were invited to discuss their water use requirements. Discussions with those licence holders are ongoing and the Controller has not made any decisions to recover water.

✔ TARGET (MET)

The target was to assess 10 water extraction licences to apply the recovery of unused water policy. This target was met, with all licences in the Ti Tree and Berry Springs water allocation plan areas reviewed under the recovery policy, with seven licences currently under further consideration for a recovery decision.

Update the department website with recovery campaigns completed and the resultant volume of water recovered

Water Resources will update the website in the form of a statement when decisions are made on the current licences being assessed under the recovery policy.

Include recovery of unused water discussions with licence holders during regional site inspections

During site inspections across the Territory, the recovery of unused water is discussed with licence holders to explain the purpose of the recovery policy and the process when it is applied to licence holders.

Furthermore, when licences are renewed, licence holders who are not meeting minimum extraction requirements are provided information about the recovery of unused water.

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Priority 5: Interference with a waterway

Complete public facing documents to: increase clarity concerning available exemptions to interfere with a waterway; increase public awareness of dam construction requirements on rural properties

Carrying out work that interferes with a waterway, such as the construction of rural dams, is common throughout the Northern Territory. A fact sheet has been developed and is available on the department's website.

The fact sheet provides guidance to property owners regarding their rights to retain water on their property without a permit, as well as information about when a permit to interfere with a waterway may be required.

The fact sheet explains what a waterway is, what constitutes an interference with a waterway, and lists the exemptions and circumstances where a permit to interfere with a waterway is not required. It outlines that it is an offence to interfere with a waterway unlawfully and provides details about the regulatory powers and options available to the department to address non-compliance.

Release an improved interference with a waterway application form

A new application form for applying to interfere with a waterway can be found on the department website. The form has been designed to provide greater clarity to applicants concerning the information to support their application and aligns with the Interference with a waterway guideline.

Carry out inspections of permitted waterway interferences

The department received five reports, from members of the public, about suspected interference with waterways around the Northern Territory. Three were found to be lawful activities under the *Water Act 1992* and 2 were found not to constitute an interference with a waterway.

✓ TARGET (MET)

A target for the year was to carry out 5 proactive site inspections of permitted interferences with waterways across the Territory. No breaches of permit conditions were identified in any of the site inspections conducted.

Foundational activities relevant to all compliance and enforcement priorities

123 licence inspections

Water Resources are committed to inspecting at least 20% of water extraction licences annually. This year, the target was to inspect 123 licences. Water Resources undertook 136 inspections. Officers prioritised sites based on the 2024–25 Compliance Plan and high priority licences. High priority licences include but are not limited to: new water licence holders, licences with no metered extraction points, licences with no reported water use, and water licences for mining and petroleum activity.

Entry of data from licence holders into central systems

To improve record keeping and compliance and enforcement targets, Water Resources have been investing in system improvements in order to make internal data systems more effective and to improve customer-facing systems to make reporting water use easier for licence holders and to improve the accuracy of water use reports. These projects are ongoing and will continue into the 2025–26 financial year.



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Department of Lands, Planning and Environment
Water Resources Division

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