

Reviewing a water plan

Water in the Northern Territory is managed by the Northern Territory Government for the benefit of all Territorians. Water resource management focuses on balancing productive use of water with the long-term viability of the resource, including the ecosystems and the social and cultural values that depend on it.

What is a water plan?

A water allocation plan shares water. Water plans are generally developed to manage water in resources where there is higher competition or demand, or where there are more complex risks and opportunities associated with water use.

Water plans are statutory documents, declared by the Minister for Water Resources that set out the water availability, management objectives, and rules for the use and management of the resource. Water plans are generally established for a period of 10 years; the maximum period of declaration, as stipulated under section 22B(2) of the *Water Act 1992* (the Act).

As required by section 22B(3) of the Act, water plans must be reviewed at a period of no longer than 5 years – known as a mid term review. Water reviews can also be triggered for other reasons, including to take into account recent scientific investigations or where new or increased risks are identified.

What's involved in reviewing a water plan?

The primary objective of a water plan mid-term review is to determine whether:

- the scientific assumptions on which a plan is based, have changed
- there is a new or increased risk to the water resource that should be reflected in the plan
- the plan is achieving its objectives.

A mid-term review also provides opportunity to:

- assess the progress of any implementation actions identified in the plan
- ensure the plan remains compliant with the Act
- prioritise the future water management activities for the region.

During the mid-term review a technical water resource assessment is usually undertaken to assess the appropriateness of the scientific assumptions used to estimate the water resource underpinning the water plan. A summary of this technical assessment is also made available.

The review aims to consider all of the available information that has been collected during the intervening period between a plan's declaration and review (typically 4 to 5 years of data), including identifying changes or trends in water use, climate and weather patterns etc. A review also aims to identify and evaluate how the management mechanisms in the plan have influenced the resource.

All planning documents, including mid-term reviews, are available on the department webpages for each of the relevant plan areas: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/water/management-security/water-allocation/water-allocation-plans>



Figure 1. Brief overview of the water plan cycle based on a 10 year water allocation plan