



Changes to the

Alinytjara Wilurara NRM Board's Regional NRM Plan

Permits required for water affecting activities in the Alinytjara Wilurara region

The Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation recently approved an amendment to the Alinytjara Wilurara (AW) Natural Resources Management (NRM) Board's Regional NRM Plan that will mean that for the first time in this region, permits for water affecting activities will be required. The Minister adopts the Board's Regional NRM Plan under the NRM Act (2004).

Water in the region is scarce and precious. In consultation meetings with Aboriginal people across the region in development of our NRM Plan, water resources were consistently identified as a high priority. There was a strong interest by Aboriginal people in seeing water used wisely and carefully for the benefit of Aboriginal people in the region. There were some concerns related to the ongoing sustainability of water supplies for human consumption, the potential impact of major development on water supplies and a desire to maintain full control over surface water which in this region has high cultural and spiritual values.

The AW NRM Board developed a water policy in 2012 that reflected the aspirations and values of the regional Aboriginal community. The principles identified in this policy were important in helping to guide the drafting of the NRM Plan:

- **Acknowledge:** Water policy should take into account the strong connection and knowledge of Aboriginal people to water
- **Informed consent:** Aboriginal people on the lands understand the implications of water policies and agree to them
- **Participation:** There is broad participation by Aboriginal people in making decisions about how water should be managed
- **Culture:** Water policy supports traditional and contemporary Aboriginal cultural values and needs

Over a period of nine months, staff of Natural Resources Alinytjara Wilurara (Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, DEWNR) and the water policy and planning areas of DEWNR drafted the changes to the NRM Plan. The water planning staff of DEWNR were able to make use of parts of the NRM Act (2004) which had never been used before to meet the policy objectives of the Board in the Plan.

Consultations were held with the Aboriginal Land Holding Authorities in the region, DMITRE, SAAL NRM Board and SA Water to review the wording of the draft Plan. A final draft was endorsed by the Board of the AW region, which has representation from each of the Aboriginal Land Holding Authorities in the region, and is the only such Board in Australia that has 100% membership by Aboriginal people.



The key objectives of this Plan are that:

- Water sources that support important cultural features and activities in the landscape are protected
- Water supplies for townships and homelands are protected
- An equitable balance is achieved between environmental, social and economic needs for water
- The rate of the taking and use of the water is sustainable (or acceptable in the case of non-recharged aquifers)
- Water quality is protected
- There is no loss of rights for existing users
- Water is shared fairly between users.

The Board and staff of Natural Resources Alinytjara Wilurara are now engaged in a process of working with staff from across DEWNR, DMITRE, DPTI, SA Water, EPA and South Australian Arid Lands NRM Board to create and implement the permit approvals and processing.

Importantly, the Board directed staff to use existing processes wherever possible in the implementation of the Plan. For example, the Board has endorsed approvals processes used by DMITRE for water affecting activities relating to mining and petroleum exploration, and a separate approvals process by the Board will not be required.

The Board would prefer to make use of existing processes for issuing permits, and regional staff are negotiating with the SAAL NRM region to determine if it would be appropriate to make use of their processes for issuing permits. The Board will also work with Aboriginal Land Holding Authorities to try and ensure that cultural approvals for any works need only be sought once.

The Board believe that this is the first regional water plan in Australia that has been driven by and endorsed by Aboriginal people. The NRM Act underpins this new law that ensures that water will be used wisely in this region, and gives Aboriginal people a strong voice in how water is used.

If you would like any further information, or a copy of the key changes to the NRM Plan, please contact Matthew Ward, Regional Manager for Natural Resources, Alinytjara Wilurara (matthew.ward@sa.gov.au).