Water Allocation Plan for the
River Murray Prescribed Watercourse
Water licences for marinas, canal estates and other artificial water bodies

Introduction

Artificial water bodies to be constructed or enlarged on the River Murray, including marinas and canal estates, require a water management authorisation. The requirements are included in the Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse (the Plan). A water allocation is required for the once off initial fill and then for topping up of an artificial water body every year to compensate for annual net evaporation losses.

Who does this apply to?

The requirement for a water management authorisation relates to all new artificial water bodies that are greater than 190m² in size that divert water away from a prescribed watercourse, including the River Murray. This includes marinas and canal estates.

The requirements also apply where an existing artificial water body is to be enlarged. A water allocation is required for the volume of the enlarged area.

Exemption for minor works

An exemption is in place for minor works, where the works have a surface area equal to or less than 190m². This is about the size of a channel for a boat ramp or a private mooring of one boat to a depth of one metre. Anything bigger than this requires a water allocation.

The exemption applies to the taking of water but not the construction itself. While a water allocation is not required, minor works still require the usual relevant approvals prior to construction (eg development approval). A site use approval and water resource works approval may still be required.

What approvals do I need for a new artificial water body on the River Murray?

In addition to the usual approvals to construct the artificial water body (development approval or water affecting activity permit), the following water management authorisations are required to fill and operate the structure:

Water allocation – a volume of water that can be taken in a water use year. A water allocation is required to cover the initial fill of the water body, and to cover annual net evaporation losses. There is no new water available for allocation from the River Murray, so the water allocation must be purchased. Water can be purchased on a temporary or permanent basis.
Water Resource Works Approval – this authorises the construction, maintenance and operation of works that relate to taking water from a prescribed water resource. It applies to the way the water is taken at a particular site. For an artificial water body, this means the works required to construct, maintain and operate the marina or other artificial water body.

Site Use Approval – this details the land where the water allocation can be used, along with any conditions that relate to the use of the water. The approval also details the purpose of the use of this water. For an artificial water body, the site use approval relates to the site of the marina (or other artificial water body) and the purpose is to fill the artificial water body.

Initial fill volume
When the artificial water body is first constructed, an allocation for a specified volume of water will be required for the initial fill. This is a once-off amount that needs to be obtained prior to filling the artificial water body. This volume will be calculated from the information provided by the applicant, for example through engineering and concept drawings that form part of the development application. The volume is then reviewed after construction to make sure the actual amount is the same as the original estimate.

If the development is staged, the volume required to fill each stage of the artificial water body will need to be obtained prior to completion of each stage of the filling process. Fill over subsequent years will require a water allocation that covers the fill volume for that year as well as a volume to compensate for annual net evaporation losses from the existing stages of the artificial water body.

Where an existing anabranch, backwater or other natural water body is to be enlarged, a water allocation, water resource works approval and site use approval will only be required for the volume of the enlarged area.

Annual net evaporation losses
An annual water allocation is required to compensate for annual net evaporation loss from an artificial water body. The construction of the artificial water body results in an increase to the amount of water that will evaporate from the river and this is considered a ‘take’ of water.

The volume required to cover annual net evaporation losses is 0.8 kilolitres per square metre of surface water of the artificial water body for locations below Lock 1, and 1 kilolitre per square metre of surface area of the artificial water body for locations above Lock 1.

What happens when allocations are reduced in a dry period?
The annual water use of an artificial water body remains the volume of water required to compensate for annual net evaporation losses each year, even during years when there may be restrictions placed on water allocations.

What if I want to desilt an existing artificial water body?
Desilting an artificial water body is permitted and does not require further approval provided that-

- Desilting only involves removing material deposited since the artificial water body was constructed, or previously desilted;
- Desilting does not enlarge the artificial water body;
- The material removed is not placed in or near a watercourse, floodplain or lake; does not cause issues for the flow of water or harm native vegetation; does not re-enter a water body; and
- Appropriate measures are taken to minimise water quality impacts during desilting.

Salinity monitoring
Salinity monitoring is required for artificial water bodies located on the River Murray. Salinity and water-level monitoring requirements will be determined according to the location of the artificial water body, and the licensee will be notified of specific licence conditions that relate to this.

I want to find out more about...

How to apply for a water allocation, site use approval or water resource works approval, please contact the DEW Berri Office:

T: (08) 8595 2053
E: dewwaterlicensingberri@sa.gov.au

The Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse:

T: (08) 8463 6877
E: rmwap.feedback@sa.gov.au

Or visit: