Water access guidance for proponents of state significant renewable energy developments and infrastructure

This guidance provides proponents with information about options and expectations for accessing and taking water for water supply.

Access to water is essential for most developments in both the construction and operational phases. This guidance will support proponents of state significant development (SSD) and infrastructure (SSI) to avoid costly delays by navigating pathways to access water as early as possible in the planning process. Projects can be declared state significant under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* if they are important to the state for economic, environmental or social reasons.

Provide as much information as possible, as early as possible

Water issues need to be considered at 2 key steps in the development approval process for SSD/SSI projects and throughout the assessment of the project. The 2 key steps are:

- issuing of Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs)
- preparation and submission of Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Each step requires consideration of the proposed project, its water requirements and potential impacts.

Early identification of the water requirements and understanding the necessary water licensing and approvals can enable projects to progress smoothly through assessment and avoid costly delays.

Quantify the water requirements of each use or activity

Proponents must quantify the maximum daily, weekly and annual water requirements for each activity that uses water. They should specify which of these uses require potable water and which only require raw water. Table 1 lists common uses of water that proponents should itemise. Where possible, proponents should provide in their EIS the estimated water requirements for these uses as a time series and should refer explicitly to established construction industry standards.

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Table 1 Common uses of water that should be itemised in planning applications

Common uses of potable water	Common uses of raw water
• Drinking water, food preparation and water for domestic uses including personal hygiene by workers in accommodation (camps vs. in town) • Drinking water, food preparation and water for domestic uses including personal hygiene by workers on construction sites	• Concrete batching • Dust suppression • Earthworks compaction • Vehicle and plant washdown

All projects should develop and document a water balance as early as possible, in the EIS stage. The water balance should quantify all water inputs and outputs and the proponent should use this as the basis for its water and wastewater management plan.

Identify sources of water

Proponents must identify the preferred and alternative sources of water as early as possible, allowing time to identify and resolve potential issues before the EIS is submitted. Some water utilities do not have capacity to provide additional servicing, and many raw water sources are fully allocated. Identifying these issues early is therefore essential and will minimise the need for revisions in the assessment process.

At a minimum, and in addition to requirements of the SEARs, the EIS should:

- identify specific water utilities that could provide water
- provide evidence that the proponent has engaged the utilities and confirmed in-principle viability
- identify raw water sources that could be accessed and provide an assessment of the water sources' ability to provide water to the project (for example, by referring to the NSW Government's water trade dashboard); see 'Identify sources of water appropriate for the need' below
- articulate a strategy to access water from raw water sources (for example, by specifying use of existing or new water supply works, and by providing a strategy for acquiring entitlement or allocation via trade).

Include any proposed water supply works in EIS

An impact assessment of construction and operation of any water supply works on water users and the water sources will need to be included in the EIS. The specified works will be assessed as part of the SSD/SSI process. Any water supply works that are not assessed as part of the EIS will require a

separate water supply works approval application after assessment of the SSD/SSI. This will add time and cost post-determination. The department cannot guarantee the outcome of a future assessment, so any works which are not included in the EIS cannot be considered as feasible water supply options.

Identify sources of water appropriate for the need

Proponents must identify the different sources of water that are appropriate for a project's various water-using activities, and should consider availability, access issues, water quality and cost. The specific considerations outlined below should be addressed in the EIS.

Potable water from a water utility

Potable water is water treated to a quality suitable for drinking. It can be sourced from a local water utility with agreement from that utility, or raw water can be treated at, or near, the point of use.

Potable water is high-value water and should generally only be used for domestic purposes and proponents should avoid using potable water for activities that do not require treatment to drinking water quality. For example, although concrete batching requires high quality water meeting certain chemical specifications, it does not typically require water treated to a drinking quality. Proponents should explore options to treat water only to the required standard, rather than seeking to access potable water from a water utility for uses that do not require such a high quality.

Water utilities can often supply potable water, but each will have different limits on its ability to meet a project's needs. There may be limits on a utility's capacity to produce the volumes required, or on the infrastructure needed to deliver water (for example, physical connections to a reticulation network or fill stations for water carting).

Proponents must engage with water utilities as early as possible to confirm their ability to supply and their in-principle support, or to allow enough time to plan for alternative measures. Proponents should discuss the following with water utilities:

- expected demands, including volumes and timings
- proposed method of connection to access water (direct connection to the reticulation network, or water carting).

Potable water treated on site

Where a project cannot access water from a water utility, raw water can be treated on site using a package treatment plant. Package plants that meet relevant health standards are widely available and can be purchased or rented for installation on site.

Suppliers of drinking water are required by the *Public Health Act 2010* to develop and comply with a quality assurance program. The relevant local Public Health Unit can provide information and advice (see 'Who can help?').

Raw water from a surface water or groundwater source

Proponents can access raw water from surface water or groundwater sources within the rules of the relevant water sharing plan, and subject to licensing and approvals (see below). Proponents should demonstrate in their EIS that the identified water sources and water supply works can provide the water volumes and water quality required to meet the specific project uses. A consultant can provide this analysis.

To avoid the need for additional post-determination assessments, the EISs must contain enough detail about the specific raw water access methods for water supply works. This detail should:

- identify whether the proponent needs a new water supply work (bore or pump) or whether it has negotiated access to an existing work with the owner of that work. Using an existing work will reduce the assessment timeframes compared to using a new work provided that the EIS identifies the specific work.
- provide all relevant details about any proposed new works, including assessment of impacts associated with construction and operation of those works.

Recycled water

Recycled water is wastewater (domestic sewage) that has been treated to a standard suitable for beneficial reuse. Using recycled water can significantly reduce demand on other water sources. Proponents can access recycled water by negotiating with the owner of a wastewater treatment plant (subject to approval) or by producing it on site. The NSW Government's Recycled water roadmap provides additional information about opportunities for recycled water in NSW.

Understand your options for water licensing and water supply work approvals

The Water Assist tool is the best place to start for understanding a project's specific licensing and work approval requirements. The department's licencing and approvals website also contains detailed information about water licensing and water supply work approvals in NSW, and the relevant processes and requirements.

Who can help?

More information is available on NSW Government websites, including key guidance on groundwater and surface water conditions.

The following agencies are responsible for different aspects of water access assessment and management for state significant development and infrastructure:

- The Water Group in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) assesses applications made through the SSD/SSI process and provides formal advice to the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to inform project determination and conditions of approval. The department also assesses water access licences and water supply work approvals, controlled activity approvals and regulate water utilities and can provide advice on recycled water. More information is available on the department's website.
- WaterNSW processes trade transactions (referred to as 'dealings' in legislation).
- NSW Health regulates drinking water suppliers and provides information and support on legislative requirements.

DCCEEW's water enquiries team can help with general information and questions:

- Phone: 1300 081 047 (Monday to Friday 9 AM to 5 PM)
- Email: water.enquiries@dcceew.nsw.gov.au

WaterNSW customer service can be contacted on:

- Phone: 1300 662 077 (Monday to Friday 8 AM to 5 PM)
- Email: customer.helpdesk@waternsw.com.au

NSW Health can help with information and advice about safe drinking water:

- Phone 1300 066 055 to connect to your local Public Health Unit and ask to speak with an Environmental Health Officer.