

# Irrigation corporation fees

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## Background paper

April 2026

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# Acknowledgement of Country



Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency – Boss Lady Creative Designs, created the People and Community symbol.

Irrigation corporation fees

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# 1 About this document

The Water Group in the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) is proposing to commence new fees for NSW irrigation corporations (IC) from 1 July 2026. This publication outlines the proposed new fees and provides background on how the fees were developed.

The purpose of this document is to support consultation on the proposed new fee structure from 7 April to 5 May 2026.

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## 2 Background

The administration and management of IC operating licences has progressively declined due to organisational and legislative changes. Since 2014, the department has undertaken limited work on IC licensing. Regulatory, governance and resourcing gaps were identified as very high risk in a recent internal audit and also became evident in the statutory review of the department's functions under section 10 of the *Water Management Act 2000* (WM Act).

A detailed review of IC licensing administration highlighted several areas that require regulatory improvement to ensure compliance with the WM Act. A program of work (the Irrigation corporation regulatory improvement program) is now underway to address the following issues:

- dispute resolution
- re-establishing a fee structure
- regulatory gaps
- legacy licensing and approval matters.

A key priority of this program is establishing fees for services related to the management and administration of IC operating licences. ICs have not been charged for these services since 2017.

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## 3 Purpose of irrigation corporation fees

Charging fees enables the department to recover the cost of delivering services related to the management and administration of IC operating licences. As part of its commitment to the National Water Initiative (NWI) principles, the NSW Government applies cost-recovery and user-pays approaches for goods, services, and regulatory activities, including the government resources devoted to water planning and management. Because the previous fee arrangements were based on repealed legislation, new fees must be established to align with the requirements of the WM Act.

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## 4 Non-IPART fees

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW (IPART) determines water licence and approval consent transaction fees payable under Chapter 3 of the WM Act. These fees apply to all NSW licence and approval holders, including ICs.

The new fees relate to IC operating licences which are addressed under Chapter 4 of the WM Act and therefore outside of IPART's scope. For this reason, the fees were not included in the 2025 IPART review of fees proposed by the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation (WAMC) and do not require IPART approval. The Minister for Water can impose fees for the purposes of the WM Act.

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## 5 How the fees were developed

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### 5.1 Considerations in developing fees

To develop the IC fee model, the department adopted a similar approach to that used to build the licensing and approval consent transaction costs submitted for the 2025 IPART review of WAMC prices. We have also incorporated feedback that IPART provided during that process, where appropriate, including:

- consultation with stakeholders on the approach and level of proposed fees
  - using average calculation for time/effort for each activity
  - the approach to allocating indirect costs
  - costing activities to the staff level that has the capability to perform the functions.
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### 5.2 Pricing principles used to calculate fees

The department used the NWI pricing principles to develop its fee model, ensuring that the costs of regulatory services are transparent and equitable. These principles include:

- **efficient cost recovery:** prices reflect the efficient direct costs of delivering services, as well as indirect costs associated with staff, equipment, training and supporting activities.
- **tariff structure:** prices are divided into fixed and variable components, based on the requirements of individual ICs
- **cost-reflective pricing:** prices are set to recover the efficient cost of service delivery, including appropriate staffing levels and the average time required to complete each task
- **impactor-pays pricing:** ICs are charged in proportion to the costs they generate. All indirect costs are recovered through the annual operating licence fee, which underpins all other services and fees associated with the IC operating licence
- **transparency:** charges are separated into base charges and additional charges for any technical or extra work required.

Additionally, the proposed fees were developed using the principles of **accountability** and **legality**, meaning that all charges must be supported by evidence-based costing and authorised under the relevant legislation.

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## 5.3 Objectives of the fee model

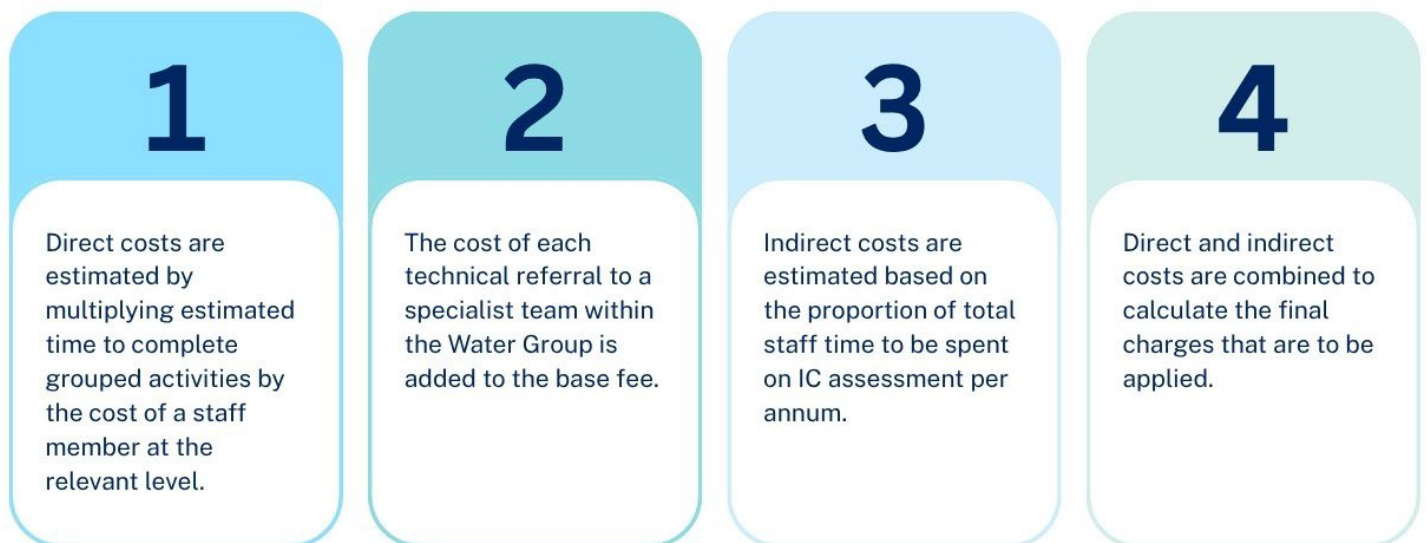
The fee model is designed to recover prudent and efficient costs of delivering regulatory services. Its key objectives are to:

- improve transparency in how regulatory fees are calculated
  - ensure proportionality, so that fees reflect the complexity and regulatory effort required
  - support streamlined and consistent service delivery
  - provide predictability and fairness across irrigation corporations
  - enable the long-term sustainability of regulatory operations.
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## 5.4 Price calculation

Time and costs were estimated for all activities required to deliver the defined services. A bottom-up costing approach was used to identify each required activity and estimate the time required to complete it. Each charge is estimated on a per application basis, with most applications having similar requirements. The steps taken to calculate prices are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The department's process for calculating irrigation corporation fees



### Notes on Step 1

Step 1 activities are grouped into the following categories:

- pre-application
- receipt of application
- initial review
- advertising, if required
- assessment
- determine application
- notification
- supervision.

## Notes on Step 2

Technical referrals are directed to specialist teams, such as surface water modelling, groundwater and surface water salinity, environmental watering, groundwater or hydrology. This expertise may be required during an application assessment to review aspects of an IC's operating licence, for an annual compliance report or to provide specialist advice requested by ICs.

## Notes on Step 3

Indirect costs:

- a. include additional hours that staff need to work on IC related activities that are not directly attributable to an assessment
- b. include items such as software licences, training and replacement computers
- c. are only applied to the annual review of operating licence fees because this is the core work required to regulate ICs
- d. are divided evenly between the 5 operating licence reviews each year.

## Estimating time to complete activities

Tasks have been estimated in minutes for each step of the assessment process to be undertaken by a staff member with the appropriate capability (and reflects pay grade). Staff across the department who have undertaken this work were consulted on these time estimates. In addition, these time estimates were reviewed against similar licensing and approval consent transaction processes where they are undertaken.

Assessments for the annual review of operating licences consider amendments that are currently proposed to be in effect from 1 July 2026.

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## 5.5 Fee model definitions

To ensure consistency, defined terms have been used to build the fee model, as outlined in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Fee model defined terms – General

Parameters	Description
<b>Prices – Direct costs only</b>	These are the costs that can be directly attributed to activities and charges. This cost is calculated by multiplying the time required to complete the task by the applicable hourly rate for the staff level performing the work.
<b>Indirect costs</b>	Indirect operating costs (software licences, replacement computers, staff development) and a percentage of time staff spend on relevant activities.
<b>Prices = Direct + Indirect</b>	Combining direct and indirect costs into full cost prices.
<b>Assessments</b>	This represents the forecast number of assessments each year.

Table 2: Fee model defined terms – Application to be assessed

Reference	Parameters	Description
1	Inclusion of land	Includes activities and time required to complete an assessment for the inclusion of land in an IC's operating area. Applies to the first property listed in a joint application made by the IC and property holder/s.
2	Exclusion of land	Includes activities and time required to complete an assessment for the exclusion of land in an IC's operating area. Applies to the first property listed in a joint application made by the IC and property holder/s.
3	Include-exclude extra properties	The activities and time taken to complete assessments for each additional property listed in an application for the inclusion or exclusion of land.
4	Inclusion-exclusion advertising	This includes activities, time and newspaper advertising required to complete an assessment for an inclusion of land to or exclusion of land from an IC's operating area.
5	Annual fee for review of operating licence (FY26/27)	The activities and time taken to complete an annual review of the operating licence for financial year (FY2026-27). This fee will become obsolete after 30 June 2027.
6	Annual fee for review of operating licence (FY27/28 and ongoing)	The activities and time taken to complete an annual review of the operating licence from FY 27/28. The fee amount will be reviewed in the future
7	Renewal fee for operating licence	The activities and time taken to renew an operating licence.
8	Fee to amend operating licence	The activities and time taken to amend an operating licence.
9	Technical	These are the activities and time taken by hydrogeologists, salinity and other department specialists to complete a technical review and comment on the annual review of IC operating licences (which includes assessment of compliance with Annual Compliance Reports and Monitoring and Reporting Plans), or review of amendments or renewal of an operating licence and associated conditions.

Application assessment tasks outline the activities and time taken by an officer to perform each task. The average time has been allocated against each task. Senior staff with experience undertaking the work have contributed to the model.

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## 5.6 Fee model assumptions

We have made certain assumptions to underpin fee model calculations.

### Key assumptions

- Staff costs will increase in line with CPI in future years (this is why we have not calculated prices for future years)
- Staff will continue to be paid according to applicable Crown Employees Awards
- Average time taken to complete work has been used, assuming staff will become more efficient at performing required tasks
- Time required to complete activities are estimated based on best available information for new activities.

### Minor assumptions

- The number of assessments per year are based on best available information
- Four weeks of holidays are taken by each staff member each year
- There are 52 weeks in a year not 52.1429
- The number of sick days taken per staff member are 5 per year.

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## 6 Commonwealth water charge rules

ICs have obligations under the Commonwealth [Water Charge Rules 2010](#) that provide a framework for the pricing and regulation of water charges in Australia. In their treatment and management of fees, ICs that operate in the Murray–Darling Basin and meet the definition of an infrastructure operator must:

- publish a compliant, up-to-date schedule of charges
- ensure non-discriminatory pricing
- adhere to Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) oversight if classified as a Part 6 or Part 7 operator
- provide required information to customers and the ACCC
- apply termination fees consistent with the Water Charge Rules
- maintain full transparency of water charges and methodologies.

## 7 Services and fee schedule

The list of services and proposed fees to be introduced from 1 July 2026 are shown in Table 3. Further detail on service activities is available in Appendix A - Description of level of services.

Fees exclude the Goods and Services Tax because fees or charges to compensate an Australian government agency for costs incurred by the agency in undertaking regulatory activities are GST exempt under the Goods and Services Tax Regulations 2019.

Table 3: Services and proposed fee schedule

Service activity	Proposed fee (excl. GST)
Inclusion of land (first property)	\$2,324.67
- Per additional property included	\$1,390.71
- Advertising (as required) plus advertising cost (as invoiced)	\$431.60
Exclusion of land (first property)	\$2,324.67
- Per additional property excluded	\$1,390.71
- Advertising (as required) plus advertising cost (as invoiced)	\$431.60
Annual compliance review of Operating Licence (FY26–27)	\$15,909.85
Full annual review of Operating Licence (FY27–28)	\$24,710.61
Renewal fee for Operating Licence	\$10,600.58
Amend Operating Licence	\$9,738.48
<b>Technical Charges for Operating Licence reviews or amendments</b>	
Technical - Groundwater management (per assessment, if required)	\$5,362.48
Technical – Salinity (per assessment, if required)	\$1,725.37
Technical - Water Specialist (per assessment, if required)	\$5,347.77
Daily rate for objections to land inclusions / exclusions or other ad hoc	\$763.60

## 8 Legality

The Minister responsible for administering the WM Act may impose fees and charges according to section 114 of that Act. Many such Ministerial functions are delegated to officers within the department that is responsible to the Minister.

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## 9 Independent review of proposed fees

We engaged Frontier Economics to perform an independent economic review of the proposed new fees, with the objective to ensure efficiency and prudence of the proposed fees and to provide advice on:

1. measures, considerations and assumptions we used to develop the pricing principles and methodology that underpins the fee for service structure and cost model design
2. ensuring we satisfied the NSW Government's commitment to the National Water Initiative best practice pricing principles.

The review found that the department's proposed fees are broadly consistent with best practice pricing principles and reflect reasonable estimates of the efficient costs of providing services. The department accepted findings and recommendations from the review and amended the cost model and fees to reflect the recommendations. The fees will be reviewed after the 2027–28 financial year.

You can read Frontier Economics' [Review of non-IPART fee structure for Irrigation Corporations, 27 March 2026](#) on the department's website.

# Appendix A – Levels of service

Table 1: Levels of service that apply to all fees for irrigation corporations

Service component	Service level commitment
Service channels	Email lodgment, TEAMS meeting by appointment, and email notification of decision.
Fees and charges communication commitments	Fees are payable in accordance with the department's fee schedule. Applicants will receive acknowledgement of receipt, requests for further information where required, notification of complexity or delays, and a written determination.
Roles and responsibilities	Applicant: provide complete and accurate information. Agency: assess and determine applications and maintain records.
Escalation, complaints	Service issues may be escalated through the department's standard escalation and complaints processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Phone: 1300 081 047</li><li>• Email: <a href="mailto:water.enquiries@dcceew.nsw.gov.au">water.enquiries@dcceew.nsw.gov.au</a></li></ul>
Records, privacy and security	All records will be managed in approved systems in accordance with privacy and records management requirements.

**Table 2: Level of service for applications to include land within an Area of Operation (AoO) (First property), additional property or properties and advertising (as required)**

Service component	Service offering
<b>Service overview</b>	Service name: Application to include land within an AoO – First Property and additional property or properties Service outcome: a determination to include specific land parcels in an AoO
<b>Required inputs</b>	Completed application form, proof of ownership, lot and deposited plan (DP) details, Cadastral map of proposed inclusion, owner consent (if applicable), justification for inclusion, and application fee.
<b>Service standards</b>	Acknowledgement: 1 business day Completeness check: 5 business days Assessment: 15–20 business days Determination and notification: 4 business days following recommendation
<b>Service inclusions</b>	Application intake and validation, spatial verification, policy and legislative assessment, internal consultation, determination and notification, gazette notice, and update of AoO spatial records.
<b>Service exclusions</b>	Environmental impact assessments beyond AoO inclusion requirements, resolution of land tenure disputes, and objections received.
<b>Eligibility and assessment criteria</b>	Land must relate to a defined first property, proposed inclusion must identify the land proposed to be included in the corporation’s AoO, application must be consistent with relevant legislation, policy, and planning instruments.
<b>Quality and performance</b>	Target of 90% of applications completed within 30 business days, based on one property, additional time for additional properties

**Table 3: Level of service for applications to exclude land within an Area of Operation (AoO) (First property), additional property or properties and advertising (as required)**

Service component	Service offering
<b>Service overview</b>	<p>Service name: Application to exclude land from an AoO – First Property and additional property or properties</p> <p>Service outcome: a determination to exclude specific land parcels from an existing AoO</p>
<b>Required inputs</b>	<p>Completed application form, proof of ownership, lot and DP details, Cadastral map of proposed exclusion, owner consent (if applicable), justification for exclusion, and application fee.</p>
<b>Service standards</b>	<p>Acknowledgement: 1 business day</p> <p>Completeness check: 5 business days</p> <p>Assessment: 15–20 business days</p> <p>Determination and notification: 4 business days following recommendation</p>
<b>Service inclusions</b>	<p>Application intake and validation, spatial verification, policy and legislative assessment, internal consultation, determination and notification, and update of AoO spatial records</p>
<b>Service exclusions</b>	<p>Assessments for applications covering multiple unrelated properties, creation of a new AoO, environmental impact assessments beyond AoO exclusion requirements, and resolution of land tenure disputes.</p>
<b>Eligibility and assessment criteria</b>	<p>Land must relate to a defined first property, proposed exclusion must identify the land proposed to be included in the corporation’s AoO, and application must be consistent with relevant legislation, policy, and planning instruments.</p>
<b>Quality and performance</b>	<p>Target of 90% of applications completed within 30 business days, based on one property, additional time for additional properties.</p>

**Table 4: Level of service for applications for annual review of operating licence from FY 2027–28**

Service component	Service offering
<b>Service overview</b>	Service name: An annual fee is charged to cover the full review of operating licences (OLs) for FY 2027–28.
<b>Required inputs</b>	Relevant documentation and compliance reports submitted by the IC; scientific, technical and monitoring information required under the operating licence (OL); specialist input from internal experts where applicable; and policy, legislative and water management frameworks that guide assessment.
<b>Service standards</b>	Provision of timely, accurate and consistent advice; transparent communication regarding information needs, outcomes and next steps; completion of review and recommendation processes within agreed timeframes; and application of professional judgement supported by technical expertise.
<b>Service inclusions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-level pre-submission guidance to improve the quality of IC submissions</li> <li>• Evaluation of compliance with OL conditions and reporting requirements</li> <li>• Consideration of specialist scientific and technical advice</li> <li>• Formulation of recommendations, including any required amendments</li> <li>• Engagement with the IC to discuss findings and outcomes</li> <li>• Preparation of formal advice aligned with governance and approval pathways</li> </ul>
<b>Service exclusions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of monitoring, reporting or compliance work on behalf of the IC</li> <li>• Activities outside the scope of OL review or related statutory responsibilities</li> <li>• Extensive policy development beyond high-level recommendations</li> </ul>

Service component	Service offering
<b>Eligibility and assessment criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicable to ICs holding an OL or associated approvals requiring review</li> <li>• Accuracy, completeness and relevance of information submitted</li> <li>• Demonstrated compliance with operating licence conditions</li> <li>• Adequacy of monitoring and reporting practices</li> <li>• Alignment with water management principles, objectives and minimal harm provisions</li> <li>• Evidence-based consideration of any non-compliance and corrective actions</li> </ul>
<b>Quality and performance</b>	Target of 90% of applications completed within 120 business days, not including the time for Technical referral.

**Table 5: Level of service for applications for annual compliance review of operating licence FY 2026–27**

Service component	Service offering
<b>Service overview</b>	An annual fee is charged to cover the partial review of operating licences (OLs) for FY 2026–27. This review focuses on the OL reporting requirements assessing whether ICs meets the annual compliance, monitoring and reporting obligations. The service provides high-level guidance, regulatory assessment, and continuous improvement recommendations to support accurate reporting and effective water management.
<b>Required inputs</b>	Annual Compliance Report (ACR) and supporting data, and Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MRP) information. Applicable licences, approvals and OL conditions; specialist scientific and technical input (for example, Water Science, Groundwater Science, Basin Salinity); and legislative and policy frameworks relevant to water management and reporting.
<b>Service standards</b>	Provision of timely, consistent, and transparent regulatory advice; completion of reviews within established internal timeframes; high-quality assessments that reflect regulatory requirements, technical expertise, and water management principles; and clear communication of outcomes, including compliance status and required actions.
<b>Service inclusions</b>	High-level pre-submission and reporting advice to improve quality of ACRs; assessment of reporting compliance against OL conditions and related licences/approvals; consideration of scientific/technical advice to inform findings; identification of non-compliance trends and future reporting needs; development of recommendations, including updates to monitoring and reporting requirements; preparation of compliance review report and communication to the IC; and recommendations for amendments to licences, approvals, or relevant planning instruments.
<b>Service exclusions</b>	Preparing or interpreting ACRs on behalf of the IC; undertaking monitoring, sampling or data collection; providing legal advice beyond operational guidance; delivering services outside the scope of OL reporting requirements; and implementing legislative or water sharing plan amendments (beyond recommendations).

Service component	Service offering
<b>Eligibility and assessment criteria</b>	<p>Eligibility: irrigation corporations holding an OL subject to annual reporting requirements</p> <p>Assessment criteria: completeness and accuracy of ACR information; alignment of monitoring and reporting activities with OL, licences, approvals and MRP requirements; adequacy and reliability of technical/scientific data submitted; evidence of compliance or non-compliance and appropriateness of corrective actions; and consistency with water management objectives, principles, and minimal harm frameworks.</p>
<b>Quality and performance</b>	<p>Target of 90% of applications completed within 120 business days, not including the time for Technical referral.</p>

**Table 6: Level of service to renew operating licence**

Service component	Service offering
<b>Service overview</b>	A regulatory service that reviews and renews operating licences (OLs) held by ICs, ensuring licence conditions remain contemporary, legally robust and aligned with water management objectives. The review incorporates legislative and policy requirements, and ensures procedural fairness in the renewal process.
<b>Required inputs</b>	Renewal application and required supporting information; annual reports and compliance history over the licence term; existing OL approvals and associated documents; legal and policy frameworks relevant to OL renewal; relevant technical and compliance information gathered over the licence period, and submissions and feedback from the licence holder.
<b>Service standards</b>	Clear, timely advice to support high-quality renewal applications; transparent and consistent assessment against regulatory and governance requirements; procedural fairness upheld through structured consultation and submission processes; and final licence documentation reviewed, legally sound and communicated in a timely manner.
<b>Service inclusions</b>	Pre-application advice to support accurate and complete renewal submissions; consideration of compliance performance across the licence term; development of updated licence conditions where required; coordination of legal review to ensure statutory and policy compliance; provision of procedural fairness through consultation with the IC; consideration of submissions and incorporation of valid feedback; preparation of approval documentation for Executive Council decision-making; issuing of renewed licence and updating relevant registers and systems.
<b>Service exclusions</b>	Drafting applications or compliance documents for the licence holder; legal interpretation beyond operational or procedural guidance; monitoring, fieldwork or data collection activities; amendments to legislation (beyond recommendations); and services unrelated to OL renewal or approval extensions.

Service component	Service offering
<b>Eligibility and assessment criteria</b>	<p>Eligibility: irrigation corporations seeking renewal or extension of an OL</p> <p>Assessment criteria: demonstrated compliance with licence conditions during the licence term; quality, completeness and reliability of reporting and monitoring information; need for updated conditions to meet contemporary water management objectives; consideration of legal, operational and policy requirements; and feedback provided through the procedural fairness stage.</p>
<b>Quality and performance</b>	<p>Target of 90% of applications completed within 120 business days, not including the time for Technical referral.</p>

**Table 7: Level of service to amend operating licence**

Service component	Service offering
<b>Service overview</b>	A regulatory service enabling ICs to request amendments to their operating licence (OL) or related departmental requirements. The service ensures that any proposed changes are assessed transparently, consistently, and in alignment with water management objectives, regulatory obligations, and technical evidence. It supports effective operation of OLs by allowing updates that reflect evolving operational needs, scientific insights, and compliance outcomes.
<b>Required inputs</b>	Request from the IC or initiated by the department outlining the proposed amendment; supporting documentation, justification and relevant operational information; historical compliance information and annual report findings; specialist scientific, technical or policy advice; and existing OL conditions, approvals, licences and relevant legislative frameworks.
<b>Service standards</b>	Clear, timely communication to guide ICs on amendment requirements; fair, consistent assessment based on regulatory principles and evidence; consideration of relevant technical, operational and legal inputs; transparent documentation and communication of decisions; and completion of amendment processes within established internal timeframes
<b>Service inclusions</b>	High-level pre-submission advice to support quality amendment proposals; assessment of the proposed change in the context of compliance history, policy obligations, and water management principles; engagement with departmental scientific and technical experts; development of draft amendments to OLs and related instruments; consultation with the IC to support procedural fairness; coordination of legal review to ensure statutory accuracy; preparation of briefing and approval documentation for Executive Council consideration; and communication of approved amendments and updates to internal registers and systems.
<b>Service exclusions</b>	Preparing documents for the licence holder; legal interpretation beyond operational or procedural guidance; monitoring, fieldwork or data collection activities; amendments to legislation (beyond recommendations); and services unrelated to OL amendment or approval extensions.

Service component	Service offering
<b>Eligibility and assessment criteria</b>	<p>Eligibility: ICs that hold an existing OL and seek an amendment to licence conditions or departmental requirements.</p> <p>Assessment criteria: clarity and adequacy of the amendment request and supporting evidence; alignment with water management objectives, legislative frameworks and policy settings; technical merit and feasibility based on specialist advice; implications for compliance, reporting and risk management; consideration of outcomes from annual reviews and any relevant compliance events; and appropriateness and impact of proposed changes on broader regulatory instruments (licences, approvals, water sharing plans).</p>
<b>Quality and performance</b>	<p>Target of 90% of applications completed within 120 business days, not including the time for Technical referral.</p>