

The National Water Account

What is the National Water Account?

Under the Commonwealth *Water Act* (2007), the Bureau of Meteorology has responsibility for compiling and delivering comprehensive water information across Australia. This includes publication of an annual National Water Account (NWA).

The NWA will provide a valuable window into the management of Australia's water resources. It will support the important National Water Initiative goal of "public and investor confidence in the amount of water being traded, extracted for consumptive use, and recovered and managed for environmental and other public benefit outcomes".

It will do this by reporting on water availability, water access rights and water take on a consistent basis across Australia. It will complement the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Water Account, Australia* which provides a detailed account of who is using Australia's water resources and for what purpose. Together these accounts will inform water resources planning, water market activity, investment and environmental management decisions, as well as research and discussion within governments and the community.

This year, the Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau) is working closely with lead water agencies in each state and territory, as well as other Australian Government agencies and peak water industry bodies, to conduct a Methods Pilot for the NWA. The Methods Pilot aims to test data availability, methods for quantifying water budgets, water accounting standards, governance arrangements and an approach to publication for the NWA. Results from the Methods Pilot will be published in December 2009 and the knowledge gained will guide development and production of the first comprehensive NWA, due for publication in late 2010.

The Bureau will publish an annual National Water Account, containing standardised information about management of Australia's water resources, from December 2010. A pilot National Water Account will be released in December 2009.

NWA benefits

As the competition for water resources increases, it is more important than ever to fully account for how water is shared between the economy, critical human needs and the environment. The NWA will provide information that has previously been difficult to access or unavailable to general users in a standardised form.

The information presented in the NWA will be:

- publicly available
- comprehensive, covering all managed water systems
- nationally consistent and comparable
- timely and useful to governments, the water sector, industry and the general community
- transparent.

The NWA will provide a national picture of water resources management for the past year by answering the following questions for each water reporting entity:

- What were the changes in water inflows, outflows and storages?
- What water access entitlements existed?
- What water management plans applied that governed access?
- How much water was allocated as available for use?
- How much of the total water entitlement was traded and between which locations?
- How much water was taken for use?
- How much water was made available to the environment?

When mature, the National Water Account will make a significant contribution towards the improved management of Australia's water resources. The NWA's guiding principle of transparency, both in process and reporting, aims to build confidence in and understanding about the information published on volumes of water traded, extracted for use and recovered and managed for economic, public and environmental purposes.

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www.bom.gov.au/water

2009 Methods Pilot

The Methods Pilot for the NWA will produce sub-national accounts for a select number of priority geographic areas located around Australia for the 2007/08 financial year, with the 2006/07 financial year reported for comparison.

These sub-national accounts will be prepared and presented in accordance with the Preliminary Australian Water Accounting Standard developed by the Water Accounting Standards Board. The standard prescribes the components of a water accounting report along with definitions, recognition criteria, quantification attributes, units of account and disclosure requirements.

The first comprehensive NWA will build upon the lessons learned through the Methods Pilot and extend to national coverage. The reporting period is expected to be the 2009/10 financial year, with the 2008/09 financial year reported for comparison.

Consultation

The Bureau of Meteorology is engaging with key stakeholders to ensure the best possible input and comprehensive feedback on the NWA.

The National Water Account Committee, chaired by the Bureau, is overseeing production of the Methods Pilot and the first comprehensive NWA. The committee's membership includes representatives from each state and territory's lead water agency, urban and rural peak industry bodies and Australian Government agencies.

An evaluation process will follow release of the Methods Pilot and the first comprehensive NWA. Comment will be sought from a wide range of potential users of the product, particularly regarding how the NWA can be tailored to enhance its value to water managers and policy makers. Insights gained through the evaluation process will lead to continuous improvement of the product over time.

Printed and electronic versions of the NWA will be available via the Bureau's website at: www.bom.gov.au/water

Looking to the future

Water accounting is a new concept in water resources management and Australia will shortly lead the world in this discipline. As we are pioneering methods it is natural to expect considerable evolution of the National Water Account over the first few releases.

The accuracy of the accounts will improve over time as estimation and measurement techniques, and monitoring and reporting systems improve. The spatial and temporal resolution of the accounts will increase as data coverage and the Bureau's analytical capacity increases. End user feedback will be a vital ingredient in getting the accounts right.

For more information

For more information about the Bureau of Meteorology's water information role please visit our website at:

www.bom.gov.au/water

Figure 1. Delivery of a water account to a user

