



**Apply for your permit at least two months before you intend to undertake the activity.**

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# Farm Dams

## OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT 2004

**Are you thinking of building a new dam, deepening or enlarging an existing dam?**

These are just some examples of “Water Affecting Activities” (WAAs) that may require a permit. This fact sheet provides important details on farm dam development and your obligations under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004* (the NRM Act).

### WHY CONTROL DAM DEVELOPMENT?

New dam development can impact on existing water users and water-dependent ecosystems, and must be managed in a way that balances these existing needs with those for new development.

If there were no controls for the building of dams a number of problems could result:

- reduced flows to downstream users;
- reduced flows or changes to the timing of flows to ecosystems that depend on a certain flow regime;
- erosion and/or sedimentation; and
- increased salinity.

Rules are needed to protect existing downstream users and to ensure the resource is shared equitably between all water users and the environment, including native vegetation and native fauna.

### PERMIT REQUIREMENTS



*Dams for aesthetic purposes only are generally not supported.*

The NRM Act provides for the control of various activities that affect water, and this includes farm dams. Such activities are controlled through permits issued by the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board (SA MDB NRM Board).

Permit application forms can be obtained from the SA MDB NRM Board website [www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au](http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au) or a NRM Board Office. Permit applications should be lodged, with the prescribed fee, to the SA MDB NRM Board.

If the dam wall is higher than three (3) metres above the natural ground surface, or has a capacity greater than five (5) megalitres, a development application must be lodged with the local Council that meets the requirements of the council and the SA MDB NRM Board WAA policies (such as development applications will be referred to the NRM Board by the council for direction).

### HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

Apply for your permit at least two months before you intend to undertake the activity. The time taken to process the application depends on the quality of the application and the nature of the activity. Permits are usually valid for one year from date of issue.



*Dam construction or enlargement will require a WAA permit or a development authorisation.*

## CONTACT:

South Australian  
Murray-Darling Basin  
Natural Resources  
Management Board's  
Water Resources  
Assessment Officer

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Upper Level  
Cnr Mann & Walker Streets  
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**...determine if  
the site of the  
proposed dam  
is ecologically  
sensitive or  
prone to erosion  
and salinity**



## DEFINITIONS FOR FARM DAMS

### *What is an off-stream dam?*

A dam, wall or other structure that is not constructed across a watercourse or drainage path and is designed to hold water diverted, or pumped, from a watercourse, a drainage path, an aquifer or from another source. Off-stream dams may also capture a limited volume of surface water from the catchment above the dam.

### *What is an on-stream dam?*

A dam, wall or other structure placed, or constructed on, in or across a watercourse or drainage path for the purpose of holding and storing the natural flow of that watercourse or the surface water.

### *What is a low flow bypass?*

A low flow bypass is a structure, such as a small weir, used to direct low stream flows around dams and back to their normal course of flow. In this way, some water is retained in the stream to ensure that downstream environments, which may include fish, frogs and riparian vegetation may receive water to survive (this is known as an environmental flow).

A low flow bypass is one of many conditions that may be enforceable on your permit to construct an on-stream dam.

## CRITERIA FOR ISSUING PERMITS

The regional Natural Resources Management Plan and Water Allocation Plans for the relevant prescribed surface water areas set out the policies and principles by which any application for a farm dam will be assessed. The NRM Plan policies and principles are outlined in Volume B, Chapter 6. It is important that you identify the region in which the dam will be constructed and use the correct application form, because NRM Plans and Water Allocation Plans may vary between NRM regions.

Some examples of the principles which

guide farm dam development may include low flow by-passes for all on-stream dams; the construction of off-stream dams only; and avoiding ecologically sensitive areas or areas prone to erosion and salinity.

These principles cover criteria including (but not limited to):

- local soil conditions and salinity;
- remnant vegetation;
- aquatic ecosystems;
- dam construction and design;
- the number and size of dams;
- impacts on downstream users; and
- habitat for threatened species.

A SA MDB NRM Board Water Resource Assessment Officer may undertake a site inspection to determine if the site of the proposed dam is ecologically sensitive or prone to erosion and salinity.

## TAKING (USE) OF WATER

WAA permits are issued for the erection of structures or other works within a watercourse only and are not an authorisation to take (use) water. In Prescribed Area or an area under a Notice of Prohibition the taking of water for purposes other than those listed below are dealt with separately by the issuing of a water licence:

- domestic use
- drinking water for stock (does not include intensive animal keeping)
- road works
- fire fighting
- activities listed under Section 128 notices.

**Note:** For more information in relation to water licensing, please contact the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources on (08) 8595 2053.

## PENALITIES MAY APPLY!

**Undertaking a WAA without a permit or in breach of the permit conditions is an offence under the Act. If you are unsure whether the works you are proposing to do will require a permit, call the SA MDB NRM Board for advice.**