

Water Resource Management

Annual Compliance Plan 2023–2024

End of year report

Version 1.1 January 2025 (Originally published September 2024)



Cover photo: Yarramalong Weir

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We respectfully acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this Country – the lands and seas on which we meet, live, learn, work and play. We acknowledge those of the past, the Ancestors whose strength has nurtured this land and its people, and we recognise their connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them, their culture and to their Elders past and present.

This publication has been compiled by Strategic Compliance, Intelligence and Investigations of Water Operations and Systems, Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water.

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Lemon Tree Weir on the Condamine River

Foreword – our role as a regulator

The role of the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water (the department) is to manage Queensland’s water resources and riverine quarry materials, equitably and sustainably.

We make sure that water is used efficiently. This ensures that access to water is safe, reliable and affordable.

Our goal is to make sure that resources from rivers, streams, lakes, springs and groundwater systems are allocated in a way that supports environmental values, economic growth and the water needs of communities across Queensland. We do this while meeting our state and national commitments.

The department is responsible for Queensland’s water management laws and regulates activities under the *Water Act 2000*, *Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008*, *River Improvement Trust Act 1940* and the *Planning Act 2016*.

Under these laws, the department has regulatory responsibilities across various areas and functions (as illustrated in **Figure 1**). We refer to anyone who is responsible for the core areas listed in **Figure 1** as our ‘regulated community’.

The department’s Water Resource Management Regulatory Strategy describes how we carry out our regulatory functions and activities. It includes information on the principles of our regulatory approach, the tools we use, key objectives and activities.

Each year we develop our Annual Compliance Plan. This plan provides a summary of the key areas the department will focus on. For each area of focus the department has regulatory activities that will be undertaken to manage risk and non-compliant behaviour.

Queensland Water Resource regulatory functions	
Sustainable water management	Protect water resources, users and ecosystems by: › monitoring water take to ensure that it is accurate and authorised › keeping the natural function and availability of water by ensuring that capture of water or interference with natural flow paths is authorised › ensuring sustainable allocation and extraction of riverine quarry materials › regulating activities undertaken within watercourses › overseeing the bore drilling industry to make sure drillers are appropriately licensed and qualified to protect the aquifer and maintain the quality and availability of groundwater supply › ensuring water security and reliability of drinking water supply.
Public health	Regulatory oversight of water service providers such as local governments and other bodies. Our regulations make sure these operators provide high quality drinking water that is safe and meets water security needs.
Safety	Making sure referable dams across the state are built to the required engineering standards and maintained by the dam owners. This includes ensuring that they are resilient to climate change and extreme weather.

Figure 1: DRDMW’s regulatory responsibilities



Annual Compliance Plan 2023–24: End of year report

The Annual Compliance Plan 2023–24 outlined the Water Resource Management division's key areas of focus and compliance priorities for that year.

The 'areas of focus' outlined in the plan represented the highest risk activities and behaviors that required a targeted effort from the department. Focusing our efforts helps us achieve our compliance objectives in the Water Resource Management Regulatory Strategy.

The purpose of the end of year report is to inform the public about our progress, outcomes and insights gained over the last year. The department is committed to being a modern, best practice regulatory agency which includes being accountable and transparent with the community on how we perform our regulatory responsibilities.

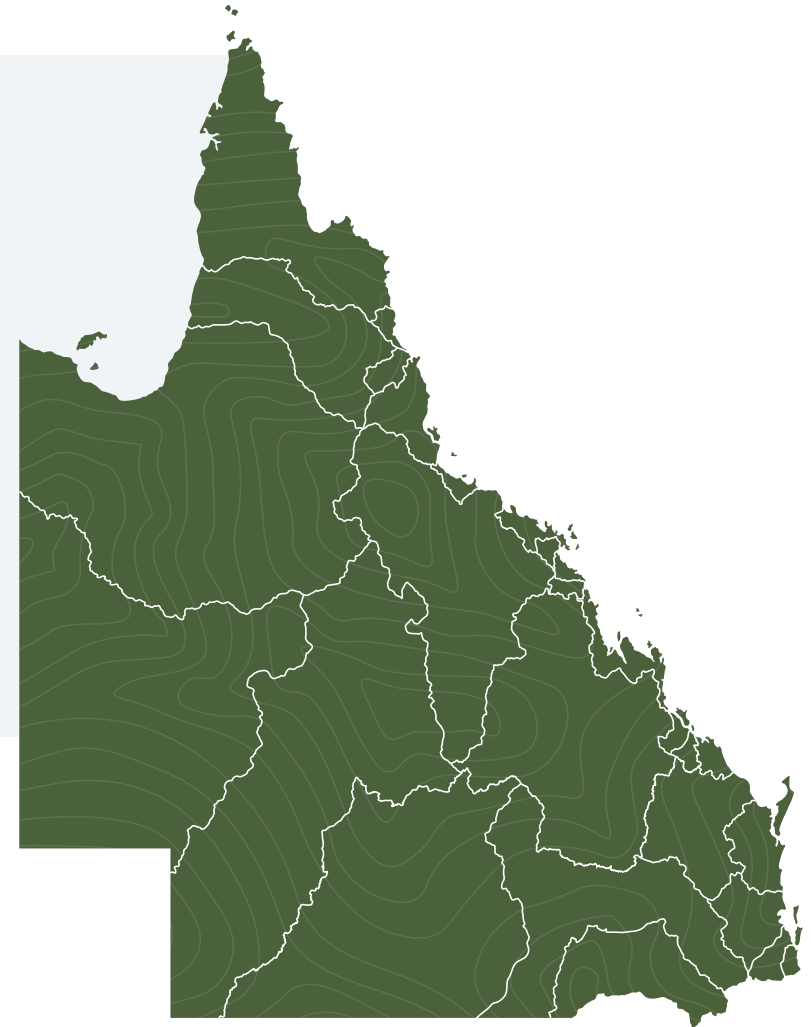
The information in this report provides further detail about the progress made against the Annual Compliance Plan 2022–2023.

About our Water Resource Management division

- › **23** water plans with over **204** catchments across **78** local communities
- › **442** staff located in **13** offices across Queensland

We regulate over

- › **41,600** individual water entitlements
- › **84** drinking water service providers
- › **116** referable dams
- › **22** major infrastructures including dams, pipelines, weirs and water grids



Planned activities

Outcomes

1. Focus on the quality and timeliness of required information to the department › Improved compliance with submission timeframes › Improved accuracy of information submitted	2. Increasing our regulatory presence › Using a variety of communication channels to engage with the community › Communicate regulatory messages and outcomes › Increase community confidence › Increase physical presence and recognition within the community	3. Spotlight certain types of non compliant behaviour › Increased detection capabilities › Changing non-compliant behaviour › Timely and proportionate compliance action, where required	› Accurate and timely submission of information has been variable in previous years and across regulatory areas. There has been improvement in some areas, and little to no improvement in others. › Regular communication across a variety of channels supports compliance overall. Outcomes could be improved by more targeted and proactive messaging that align to regulatory objectives. › Policy and legislative changes are occurring which require an education strategy to increase awareness and voluntary compliance. › A risk based approach to responding to identified non compliance continues to be required to achieve effective and efficient behavioural change.
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We report on the same areas of focus that are set out in the Annual Compliance Plan 2023–24.



FOCUS AREA 1

Focus on the quality and timeliness of information to the department

Aims

- › Increase number of submissions arriving before the due date
- › Improve the accuracy of the information we received.

Actions

We performed quality checks of submissions, to make sure:

- › it was submitted on time
- › it met the rules and requirements
- › there was no false or misleading information.

Non-compliance in this area can range from administrative error to intentionally providing false and misleading information. In most cases, we were able to address non-compliance through education.

We are improving our education and engagement strategies along with how information can be submitted to the department electronically.

Regulatory Strategy alignment



Outcomes

Quarry Material Allocation Notice (QMAN)	Meter validation certificates (MVCs)	Self read meter readings	Drinking Water Quality Management Plans	Drinking Water Service Provider Annual Reports	Emergency Action Plans (EAPs)	Dam safety reports	Referable dams	Emergency action plans
100% of monthly returns were reviewed for compliance within the required submission timeframe	1,258 received by the due date of 30 November 2023	6,296 received. 1,197 late meter readings and 283 were non-supplied	97% of amended plans and key performance indicator reports were provided on time and met requirements	89% provided on time and met requirements (fewer late reports compared to 2022–23)	83% provided on time and in accordance with requirements (a slight increase from 2022–23)	80 provided to the department on time and in accordance with requirements	No new 'referable dams' for 2023–24, however the department worked with 4 new dam owners from 2022–23 to bring them into compliance in 2023–24	Desktop review of required documentation conducted for 55 emergency action plans



EXAMPLE

Encouraging compliance with non-urban water metering rules

To continue to legally take water under their entitlement, non-urban water meter owners must get a certified meter installer to validate their meter and send us a copy of the completed certificate before their due date.

The first due date for meter owners to supply validation certificates was 30 November 2023.

To encourage compliance we:

- › sent letters to the 1,544 affected owners a year ahead of the due date
- › sent reminder letters and e-alerts six months and then three months before the due date
- › directly communicated with industry associations and encouraged them to share information with their members

- › held shed talk meetings with affected water entitlement holders/meter owners
- › used social media campaigns, advertising and other media to promote and explain the requirements
- › answered questions and concerns.

The results:

- › 1,258 certificates were received by the due date
- › 406 overdue meter validation certificates recorded as of 30 June 2024.

Audits will continue to occur to identify any water take through non-compliant meters. Depending on these findings penalty infringement notices may be issued or further action taken.



Routine audits occurring on meters that have been installed and validated



FOCUS AREA 2

Increasing our presence

Aims

- › Make information about the benefits of compliance and how to comply, more accessible
- › Improve transparency of our role as the water regulator
- › Improve targeted communication and compliance activities and outcomes
- › Get feedback from regulated entities and the broader community.

Actions

We communicated and engaged with the regulated community and interested stakeholders using:

- › social media
- › media releases
- › stakeholder newsletters
- › media interviews
- › shed talks
- › presentations at events
- › stakeholder meetings.

We measured our results by tracking:

- › percentages of submissions meeting deadlines
- › improvements in compliance behaviour metrics.

We are committed to increasing and improving our presence by using a targeted and proactive approach to communicate our regulatory objectives.

Regulatory Strategy alignment



INFORM



GUIDE

Outcomes

Non urban water management	Dam safety	Water supply regulation
› Delivered media and social media campaigns that targeted relevant audiences in specific locations to encourage compliance with quarry material allocation requirements › Engaged with water bore drillers to communicate regulatory obligations using the actions above › Held 10 metering information sessions for water entitlement holders and duly qualified persons › Met with Natural Resource Management groups — informing of riverine protection framework requirements › Held two workshops with the water bore drilling industry	› Sent four e-newsletters to dam owners › Presented 10 workshops to more than 100 dam owner representatives	› Delivered four workshops attended by 117 drinking water service provider representatives. › Feedback provided by 67 representatives reported that 94% had increased their understanding of their regulatory requirements through workshop attendance

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



Newsletter

Subscriptions to our Water Resource Management Regulatory Newsletter grew by **46%**



Online engagement and presence

42 social media posts reached over **1,529,000** impressions and saw engagement reach over **6,500**



Other communication

- › **6** media releases distributed
- › **8** website articles reaching **23,000** unique users
- › **6** videos released with a combined **800** views
- › **5** fact sheets developed



EXAMPLE

Water Supply Regulation stakeholder engagement

The Water Supply Regulation team hosts quarterly workshops throughout the year for key stakeholders. In April 2024, they hosted a full-day workshop at the Cairns Regional Council office.

It was attended by:

- › 58 participants from 20 drinking water service providers
- › representatives from key agencies, including:
 - Townsville and Tropical Public Health Units
 - qldwater
 - Department of Housing
 - Local Government
 - Planning and Public Works.

The workshop aimed to reinforce our regulatory approach and provide attendees with information and guidance to continue to meet their regulatory obligations.

Information was provided by the department on:

- › key performance indicator (KPI) reporting – highlighting the recent changes to the National Performance Reporting Framework and annual reporting requirements
- › reporting requirements for service providers dealing with drinking water incidents and events
- › local government division updates
- › information on the Urban Water Risk Assessment project.

Highlights from the workshop included:

- › a group activity on the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines
- › a discussion on water incident management from a public health perspective — specifically in the context of natural disasters.
- › a case study on Tropical Cyclone Jasper and associated rainfall and flooding, to illustrate regulatory challenges and the response strategies that were used
- › representatives from Mareeba, Cairns, and Douglas Councils shared firsthand accounts of the regulatory and operational challenges during Tropical Cyclone Jasper and in its aftermath
 - a discussion about their work to repair and rebuild the infrastructure essential for providing safe and reliable drinking water to their communities.



FOCUS AREA 3

Spotlight on certain types of non-compliant behaviour

Aims

- › Improve the way we monitor, respond to and enforce non-compliance.

Actions

We investigated:

- › repeat offenders
- › commercially or financially motivated offenders
- › those that intentionally provided false or misleading information to the department.

These activities are prioritised and investigated due to their high-risk nature. By investigating cases that displayed these behaviours, we can learn from and understand how to improve our compliance outcomes.

We also gained further insights into breaches that:

- › are not easily discovered through traditional monitoring methods
- › increased our detection capabilities and focus on unauthorised activities.

Compliance and enforcement actions require an investment of time and resources. We ensured our actions are practical, efficient and proportionate to the severity of non-compliance.

We proactively monitored through:

- › responding to third party notifications
- › conducting field and desktop audits
- › reviewing a range of information sources.

Regulatory Strategy alignment



Outcomes

Water management	Dam safety	Water supply regulation
› 6,296 audits of self-read water meter readings to account for any unauthorised water take › 867 audits of a range of water management related activities to check compliance, and to provide education of their obligations under Queensland's water management laws › 13 penalty infringement notices › 142 advisory letters › 31 warning notices › 18 statutory notices › one prosecution commenced in 2022–23, finalised in 2023–24 › one prosecution commenced in 2023–24	› 16 farm dam visits › 11 dam safety audits (field and desktop) › 16 warning notices › nine statutory notices	› 20 compliance support visits › five targeted compliance inspections › one advisory letter › 15 warning letters › 63 statutory notices › two penalty infringement notices



EXAMPLE

Quarry material extraction prosecution

Taking quarry material without a Quarry Material Allocation Notice (QMAN), or not in line with the conditions or reporting requirements of the authorisation, is an offence under the *Water Act 2000*.

Most regulated users audited each year are working within and complying with the conditions of their authorisations.

When serious breaches occur, the department has a range of tools at its disposal to deal with serious non-compliance and will act when it is appropriate and proportionate to do so.

These include:

- › an advisory letter or warning notice
- › notices that require you to take certain actions (statutory notices)
- › fines (called penalty infringement notices)
- › amendment or cancellation of your entitlement
- › prosecution for serious breaches.

In October 2023, a western Queensland quarry operator pleaded guilty to various charges in the Queensland Magistrates Court and was fined \$630,000 in total and ordered to pay \$66,358.90 in royalties plus court costs.

The quarry operator held a QMAN license to take material (soil and rocks) from a non-tidal riverine area (dry creek bed). When the quarry operator removed material in excess of that permitted by the license, the department investigated and commenced proceedings against the operator. The quarry operator breached the *Water Act 2000* with:

- › an unauthorised take of quarry materials
- › non-compliance with the conditions of a QMAN
- › providing false and misleading information to the State regarding the volume of materials taken.



Routine audits on a QMAN (not related to this example)

Our way forward into 2024–25

- › Improve on the quality and timeliness of required information to the department
- › Increase education strategies to ensure the regulated community are aware of changes in expectations and requirements as a result of new measurement requirements
- › Continue to use a variety of communication channels to reach the regulated community
- › Target key messages to reach the regulated community proactively, to set expectations and provide information on how to comply
- › Monitor progress to determine what is working and what requires changing
- › Prioritise compliance and enforcement actions using a risk-based approach to address harm and wilful non-compliant behaviour

There is still a need to focus on all three focus areas to gather further data and analyse trends across all regulatory areas. We will continue to adopt these areas of focus for the 2024–25 Annual Compliance Plan.

Read our Annual Compliance Plan 2024–25 on our website: www.rdmw.qld.gov.au/regulatory-role

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