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# Accessing bore water or groundwater

### Do I need a licence?

Yes. Anyone considering accessing groundwater in NSW must first obtain a licence or approval from the Department of Water and Energy before any drilling or bore construction takes place. This applies whether it is for stock and domestic purposes, industrial or irrigation water. Note: in some of the heavily used groundwater aquifers you can no longer obtain a new groundwater licence due to the limited amount of water. For commercial purposes such as industry and irrigation, you will need to buy a water licence from an existing licence holder.

### Is there a charge?

Application fees for licences or approvals apply in some cases for stock and domestic bores - \$48 for an artesian bore licence under the *Water Act 1912* and, in those areas where water sharing plans have commenced, \$105.69 for an approval for a bore under the *Water Management Act 2000*. There is no licence fee for non-artesian stock and domestic bores and there are no annual water charges for any stock and domestic bores.

Industrial and irrigation bore licences are subject to both licence application fees and annual water charges – contact the nearest local office of the Department for further information regarding these costs or check DWE's website.

### How long does the licence last?

Stock and domestic bore licences are issued in perpetuity but can be suspended or cancelled for improper use or to protect the health of the community in instances where the groundwater is found to be contaminated. Commercial and irrigation bore licences issued under the *Water Act 1912* are normally renewable after five years, however, licences issued under the *Water Management Act 2000* and domestic and stock bore licences under the *Water Act 1912* do not have to be renewed.

### What does domestic and stock use cover?

You must be using the water for household purposes (non-commercial uses in and around the house and garden) and for watering of stock only. In times of limited supply, restrictions on extraction under domestic and stock rights can be imposed.

### Why do I require a licence?

The Department of Water and Energy has the responsibility of managing groundwater in NSW. It is a complex and often fragile resource which plays an important role in the natural ecosystem. Groundwater sources (aquifers) are often connected to surface flows and it is important they are managed sustainably and their quality is protected.

The Department needs to have records so it can manage groundwater resources to ensure that the available water is shared fairly between the environment, towns, farmers and industries. The Department must also consider the impact the bore would have on the aquifer, as well as existing water users when it is considering an application for a new bore. Commercial groundwater licences are generally metered and have an annual extraction limit.

It is important the Department has current contact details for all bore licence holders in order to inform them of changes to their licence conditions or to advise of restriction caused by reduced water quality or quantity.



NSW Government

Department of Water & Energy

### **My property already has a bore, how do I find out if it's licensed?**

If you are unsure whether the bore on your property is licensed, contact your nearest Department office to find out. If your bore is found to be unlicensed, the Department will advise you on how to register your bore and obtain a licence.

### **What is the quality of groundwater like?**

The quality of groundwater varies greatly across NSW. In some places the water is of good quality. In other places it can be saline or contaminated and cannot be used for watering gardens or irrigation. DWE can provide you with general advice on water quality based on the records from nearby bores.

### **How much will a bore cost to install?**

This can vary enormously depending on how close the groundwater is to the surface. In places where drilling needs to be very deep or through rock, the costs can run into many thousands of dollars.

### **Who can drill a bore?**

Drillers' licences are issued by the Department of Water and Energy. Only a licensed driller is to be engaged to drill a bore. You should sight the drillers' licence as proof before you engage them. They are required to carry their licence with them at all times.

### **What if they don't have a licence?**

Unlicensed drillers are breaking the law and you should pass this information on to the Department of Water and Energy.

### **What are the penalties for illegal activities?**

Depending on the severity of the offence the Department can issue advisory and warning letters, stop work orders, remediation directions, penalty notices and can also cancel a drillers' licence and prosecute. In the most serious of cases the courts can impose large fines for drilling without a licence – up to \$132,000 for an individual and \$275,000 for a corporation. In the case of a continuing offence, the courts can impose fines of up to \$66,000 per day that the offence continues for an individual and \$132,000 for a corporation. Any compliance action taken by the Department is designed to match the severity of the offence and will be in accordance with the DWE Compliance Policy which is available from the DWE website.

### **Where do I get more information?**

Contact the water licensing officer at your local Department of Water and Energy office (contact details are on the website or phone 1800 353 104), or email [information@dwe.nsw.gov.au](mailto:information@dwe.nsw.gov.au)

More information sheets on water management in NSW are available on our website [www.naturalresources.nsw.gov.au](http://www.naturalresources.nsw.gov.au)