



**Aboriginal Areas  
Protection Authority**

protecting sacred sites across the territory

File: 2024/128-2

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Ms Amy Dysart  
Executive Director, Water Resources  
Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security

Dear Ms Dysart

### **Managing the Territory's water resources**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Mataranka Water Allocation Plan 2024-34.

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (the Authority) is a statutory body established under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989* (Sacred Sites Act) and is responsible for overseeing the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites on land and sea across the Northern Territory. The protection of Aboriginal sacred sites is recognised by the Northern Territory Government and broader Territory community as an important element in the preservation of the Territory's cultural heritage for the benefit of all Territorians.

All the Roper River tributaries in the Mataranka area have a high density of sacred sites. We have expressed our concerns over the limited protection to flows in Elsey Creek in the previous plan and have described to DEPWS staff the density of registered sacred sites here. We are pleased that the new water allocation plan recognises the outstanding cultural value of the Roper River and tributaries in the Mataranka area, as well as its unique environmental values.

We welcome the creation of the Groundwater Discharge Protected Area, which essentially prevents changes to the groundwater system that would cause flows to change beyond the natural seasonal variation. There are more than 80 sacred sites in this protected area, with more than 60 having a dependence on groundwater.

In addition, the implementation plan includes the declaration of an Environmental Protected Area in the Elsey/Mataranka area in 2024, within which the Minister can prohibit activities.

The Plan recommends not allowing any new groundwater extraction within the Protected Areas including no trades of existing entitlements into the Protected Areas and describes the current allocated volumes and the amount in use across the whole water allocation plan area. Further to not allowing any new groundwater extraction, recovering the remaining unused allocation (reducing the licensed volume to the current actual volume) within the Protected Areas would enable the Roper River and tributaries to return as much as possible to a naturalised state, in recognition of its outstanding environmental and cultural values.

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We support the ongoing monitoring and modelling to ensure the predictions the plan is based on are realised. AAPA will help to locate new monitoring boreholes through the Authority Certificate process.

If you have any queries, or require any further information please contact [Secretariat.AAPA@nt.gov.au](mailto:Secretariat.AAPA@nt.gov.au)

Yours sincerely,

Benedict Scambary

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Benedict Scambary', with a stylized, cursive script.

Chief Executive Officer  
3 June 2024