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Warrick Thorpe on his SE lucerne property  
Credit: Warrick Thorpe

## Background

The development of a Water Allocation Plan (WAP) aims to ensure that an area's water resources are allocated fairly, taking into account the needs of existing water users and the environment. This involves allocating how much water can be taken from each prescribed water resource, ie groundwater, surface water or river system.

WAPs give consideration to protect the rights of existing users, to economic development and environmental water requirements as well as identifying areas where development may strain existing resources.

## A landholder's perspective: Warrick Thorpe

A WAP aims to protect the water resource and allow food producers and other water users the security and ability to access water. This is pivotal in the succession of many businesses.

WAPs have been in force in many parts of South Australia for more than 10 years with the Eastern and Western Mount Lofty Ranges the most recent areas to develop a draft WAP.

WAPs focus on the commercial water use of businesses, especially irrigation, but these Plans also protect the domestic and stock

Two landholders give their perspectives on Water Allocation Plans and how these Plans have impacted on their farm management. Their views are an interesting contribution to recent discussions on water allocation planning in the Mount Lofty Ranges.

Landholder 1: Warrick Thorpe owns two properties, one in the South East where he grows lucerne and one at

Meadows where he runs a dairy herd. These properties are located within the Tintinara-Coonalpyn and Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges prescribed water areas respectively.

Landholder 2: Jock Harvey is a vineyard owner and member of the initial McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan advisory committee for seven years.

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water requirements of users. Domestic and stock water use is not metered or levied.

## Good for long-term water protection

Any irrigator who pays for a levy should speak up to ensure the levy is used to better manage water sustainably, as they are intended. If the funds are not used for appropriate water management purposes then we need to question why the levy is only applied to commercial users.

My concern is the possibility of increasing the levy by 5% per year, or inflation if above 5%, when agribusinesses rarely have the ability to increase produce prices regardless of the communities' ability to pay for it.

WAPs give the whole community a set of rules and boundaries designed to promote better water use and improve the longevity of water resources. A business would not pump water unnecessarily, so these allocations which are about to come into force will not be detrimental to what is currently being used.

Most people in areas that already have a WAP would not go back to a system that has no protection of the water resource.

WAPs have improved water security for businesses and reduced abuse of accessible water for short-term gain and everyone else's long-term pain.

## Water meters as a precision instrument

An additional benefit is that by installing a water meter, this adds a precision instrument which can be used to design water scheduling for the year. The combination of visual assessment, soil moisture technology and a water meter allows irrigators to deliver the most profitable amount of water with the best timing.

Having these Plans gives users a specific water allocation under a licence. This becomes a recognisable asset adding value to businesses.

Installing water meters is a good investment as a management tool. Having a WAP to manage the water resource provides a system to protect the agribusinesses of today and in the future.

I would encourage irrigators to become a member of a WAP advisory committee so your ideas and common sense as a current agribusiness water user are heard, and help build a better Plan for the future.

Most people in the community have a great empathy for those in agribusiness and some understanding of the risks of relying on climate for our bottom line.



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People who run an agribusiness have the best understanding of their professions and need to be accounted for in the WAP decision process.

**A landholder’s perspective:  
Jock Harvey**

The McLaren Vale WAP was developed following community concern over the sustainability of ever increasing levels of groundwater use in the area. As a result of the WAP, overall limits on the total amount of water used were implemented.

Having a set water allocation has resulted in better water management on my property, increased efficiency in the way that the water is used and improved the quality of the fruit that I now grow.

The WAP process means I now have a license and water allocation, which provides my business with a valuable, saleable asset. This asset (water) has increased in value since it was originally allocated.

While the total amount of water that I am now allowed to use is not as great as prior to the Plan, I can certainly recognise the benefits that the implementation of the WAP has provided.

**“ WAPs also include a program to monitor groundwater resources, which keeps an eye on the state of these resources including groundwater levels and salinity in the McLaren Vale area. ”**



A water license and allocation provides Jock Harvey’s business “with a valuable, saleable asset”  
Credit: Michael Mullan

The implementation of the WAP and subsequent introduction of licensing, metering and levies has contributed to management costs however this has ensured that the resource is being managed sustainably for the long term future of the area.

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**Water metering increases efficiencies**

The water applied on my vineyard is monitored to gain an understanding of where further efficiencies may be made.

The installation of meters has greatly assisted in my understanding of my water use and with the increased effectiveness of my business operation.

All water use, including water used for stock and domestic purposes, should be subject to metering to ensure that an accurate picture of all water use is obtained. This would lead to the identification of people who may be taking more water than they are allocated.

There has been a significant change in the attitude within local communities since the implementation of the WAP. Some initial hostility and resistance has been replaced with a high level of acceptance and cooperation, particularly due to an increase in knowledge of sustainability issues, security for irrigators and improvements in social and economic conditions.

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