

Water access on Cape York Peninsula for agricultural & food production enterprises

A fact sheet for Indigenous businesses, community enterprises and climate-smart food security projects.



DO I NEED A WATER LICENCE?

Sustainable access to and use of water is an essential element for growth in agriculture and food production in Cape York Peninsula. If you want to pump water for irrigation, aquaculture, horticulture or other commercial food production activities, you may require a water licence.

The Water Plan (Cape York) 2019 manages how water is sustainably accessed across Cape York Peninsula. There are three reserves in the water plan for consumptive purposes:

- **Strategic** - Held for future strategic/public-interest projects
- **General** - Available to eligible proponents via application
- **Cape York Peninsula Heritage Area (CYPHA)** - Reserved for Indigenous communities with cultural or economic aspirations

More than 90% of the consumptive water available under the plan is reserved within the CYPHA Reserve to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic and social development, which also includes the option of not using the water, leaving it in the rivers and creeks contributing to environmental flows. This water can also be assigned to non-Indigenous businesses for use through a sublicence agreement. CYPHA water cannot be permanently sold but traded for a fixed period.

WHAT IS CYPHA WATER?

CYPHA water is reserved to support Indigenous economic and social aspirations including agriculture, aquaculture, food security, mining, tourism, renewable energy and community development projects. CYPHA water can support climate-smart agriculture and local food production enterprises including:

- **Irrigated agriculture**
- **Market gardens, aquaponics, and food security projects**
- **Aquaculture**
- **Horticulture and native foods**

CYPHA water is allocated to eligible Land Trusts and Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate (RNTBCs) based on the area of land they have interest in within Cape York Water Plan catchments. Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses that are not eligible to hold a CYPHA water licence can access CYPHA water through an assignment process and sublicensing agreement.



HOW DO I GET CYPHA WATER?



Most businesses are not Land Trusts or Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate (RNTBCs). This means they will generally need to work with an eligible licence holder.



ARE YOU A LAND TRUST OR RNTBC?

YES!

NO!

APPLY FOR A CYPHA WATER LICENCE

Land Trusts and RNTBCs may apply directly for a CYPHA water licence. To request a licence, email the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers at WaterServicesNorth@dlgww.qld.gov.au

CONTACT LOCAL LAND TRUST OR RNTBC

Contact a Land Trust or RNTBC in your catchment and discuss a water assignment arrangement. An assignment allows an Indigenous business or enterprise to use water held under a CYPHA licence for a fixed period.

The process generally involves:

1. Contacting an eligible licence holder.
2. Discussing water requirements.
3. Negotiating a sublicense agreement.
4. Departmental assessment and approval.
5. Enterprise development.



Given the large volumes of unallocated or assigned CYPHA water, securing a CYPHA water licence is a good option to explore.

WHAT OTHER OPTIONS DO I HAVE TO SECURE A WATER LICENCE FOR MY PROJECT?



There are existing non-Indigenous water licences in some catchments that could be purchased or leased, but the water market in Cape York is not well established.



Construct an off-stream dam to capture overland flow (subject to applicable requirements). Further information is available from Business Queensland [Building or buying a dam](#).



Seek a further release of unallocated water from the general or strategic reserve within the Cape York Water Plan, although this is unlikely due to the large amounts of existing unallocated water in the CYPHA reserve.



WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

To find a Land Trust or RNTBC:

Email WaterServicesNorth@dlgwv.qld.gov.au for information on Aboriginal freehold land

Search the [National Native Title Register](#)

Search the [Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations \(ORIC\)](#) Public Register

The Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia is supporting research into the activation of CYPHA water reserves including a situation analysis and practical guide. Further information can be found on their website [Situational Analysis - Activating Indigenous Peoples' Water Rights Under the Water Plan \(Cape York\) 2019 - Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia](#)

Queensland Government Water Information

www.business.qld.gov.au - search CYPHA Water

capeyorknrm.com.au

Geoff Wilson, Program Lead - Climate Change & Sustainable Agriculture
on 0419 655 780 or email geoff.wilson@capeyorknrm.com.au

Cape York contains significant water resources reserved for Indigenous economic development. If your business requires water for agriculture, aquaculture or food production, start discussions early with Land Trusts, RNTBCs and government agencies to identify the most suitable pathway.



Australian Government

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