

Dams, bores hog precious water

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Cattle farmer Ross Leckie by his farm dam. Picture: Calum Robertson *Source: The Advertiser*

FARM dams in the Western Mount Lofty Ranges stop more than 25 billion litres flowing into our most important reservoirs.

A further 50 billion litres is drawn from bores in the region, the Natural Resource Management Board says.

In an average year, Adelaide consumes about 216 billion litres of water.

Most of this water comes from 10 reservoirs in the Western Mount Lofty Ranges, which store about 198 billion litres when full.

The Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board says there are 13,000 dams and 11,500 bores in the western region, which is subject to a controversial draft water allocation plan.

Of these, 1680 dams and 1700 bores used for irrigation and other commercial purposes will require a water licence and the amount of water used will be metered. After the year 2012-13, the board is likely to charge for use at a rate of 1 cent per kilolitre.

"Extracting water from a dam has the same impact on the total water resources available as extracting water from a bore," regional manager Kym Good said.

"Meters will be required for dams in the Western Mount Lofty Ranges used for irrigation and other commercial purposes so that the volume of water taken from a dam can be measured.

"This will allow the water resources in the Western Mount Lofty Ranges to be monitored and managed, and ensure that allocations are not exceeded so there is sufficient water for downstream users and the environment."

On average, about 60 per cent of the water for metropolitan Adelaide comes from the Western Mt Lofty Ranges, Environment Minister Paul Caica says.

"It is not only critical that we manage this resource sustainably for those industries that rely on it, but also because it underpins our urban supply," he said.

"The State Government is committed to implementing water allocations plans across South Australia to ensure our water is shared fairly between all users."

SA Dairy Farmers Association president David Basham supports the plan. "Generally a plan is an important thing for existing users, to protect them against new users coming in and taking an unregulated resource, as it has been in the past," he said.

"This will guarantee our water to us."