

## **WATER RESTRICTIONS – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### ***Does Council own, operate and manage Chaffey Dam?***

No. Chaffey Dam is owned, operated, managed and controlled by the State Government water authority known as WaterNSW.

Tamworth City is only one customer accessing water from Chaffey Dam when that water is available. Other WaterNSW customers, mostly farm irrigators in the Peel Valley, can also access water from Chaffey Dam.

This is important when considering how high water restrictions trigger levels should be set for Tamworth based on water level in Chaffey Dam. Setting restrictions at higher levels won't necessarily save water for Tamworth because the other customers have access to this water and whilst Tamworth is guaranteed a certain volume of water in the dam the remaining water can be sold to other customers.

### ***Does Tamworth get to use all the water in Chaffey Dam?***

No. Chaffey Dam is owned and operated by the State government which provides water for town water supplies, river flows, domestic requirements, irrigated agriculture, industry, flood mitigation and environmental flows. The dam provides water supplies and drought security to the city of Tamworth and significant irrigation along the Peel Valley, including supplies used for the production of cotton, wheat, lucerne, vegetables, fruit trees, oil seeds and fodder as well as pastures for sheep and cattle. There are 192 licences with a 48,292 megalitre entitlement along 590km of river:

- general security entitlements 30,468 megalitres
- high security/industry entitlements 973 megalitres
- stock and domestic requirements 177 megalitres
- town water supplies 16,400 megalitres (Tamworth)

Water users hold access licences which determine their share component. Share components specify how much of the valley's resource is available for each licence holder to use. Examples of high security licence holders are local councils for town water supply and permanent crops such as orchards.

### ***Does Council own, operate and manage Dungowan Dam?***

Yes. Council does own and operate and have exclusive access to the water in Dungowan Dam. However, Dungowan is a comparatively small dam when compared to other dams across the wider area. By way of comparison these dams have the following volumes:

- Keepit - 424 gegalitres
- Split Rock – 397 gegalitres
- Chaffey – 102 gegalitres
- Dungowan – 6 gegalitres

All correspondence should be addressed to the General Manager:

Telephone: 6767 5555  
Facsimile: 6767 5499

PO Box 555 (DX 6125)  
Tamworth NSW 2340

[trc@tamworth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:trc@tamworth.nsw.gov.au)  
[www.tamworth.nsw.gov.au](http://www.tamworth.nsw.gov.au)

### ***Why don't you just use odds and evens for water restrictions?***

Odds and evens is a system whereby odd numbered houses are allowed to water one day, even numbered houses the next. Odds and evens were tested as a system prior to 2007 and data found that consumption actually *increases*.

This increase was put down to the psychology of residents wanting to make sure they used their quota, regardless of whether or not it was necessary. If they saw the neighbour watering yesterday, they had to water today, or they felt they were missing out.

### ***Why doesn't Council abide by its own restrictions?***

Council does comply with water restrictions with the exception of times when sprinklers are allowed to water green space. Given staff commence work at 7am it is sometimes not possible to complete all watering of fields with manually operated sprinkler systems by 8am or within the 2 hour restricted period. To do so would require staff to work overtime resulting in additional cost to ratepayers.

Council is working towards installing electronic controlled systems at all green spaces. But even so there will be times when irrigation systems need to be maintenance-tested for short periods in order to ensure they are operating as efficiently as possible and this will be done during working hours.

### ***Why don't you apply restrictions earlier?***

Council adopted a new Drought Management Plan in 2015 that includes stricter restriction triggers than ever before.

The Drought Management Plan is a guide detailing how Council will manage its water supplies so that no one centre runs out of water. It is not meant to ensure that we have the maximum amount of water available all the time.

Regarding *current* trigger levels – we don't go earlier for many reasons. A common misconception is that water restrictions mean we have no water, or are in a dire situation. This is far from true.

In fact, based on research conducted for the new Drought Management Plan, our current water management practices will meet projected growth in the region for the next 20-30 years.

Further to this, we are undertaking preliminary investigation into 4 options that have been identified, including the augmentation of Dungowan Dam which will, if they progress, cater for growth over the next 40-50 years.

Obviously, during this time the Drought Management Plan will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, keeping growth and the prosperity of the Tamworth region at the forefront of our planning.

### ***Why do you continue to water parks, gardens and sporting fields during restrictions?***

As part of the review of the old Drought Management Plan Council asked residents for feedback on whether we should water sporting fields and green spaces even if restrictions have been applied to the general community. The resounding answer was yes. But there is a difference between maintaining a residential garden and maintaining public parks, gardens and playing fields.

For instance, it is impossible to maintain Riverside Sporting Fields using a handheld hose for two hours. So watering with sprinklers is allowed but within the new Drought Management Plan, Council has a system where public parks, gardens and playing fields are prioritised from 1-5, with

Category 1 the highest priority, Category 5 the lowest. As restrictions are introduced the lower priority sites stop being irrigated completely.

When Level 4 water restrictions are reached irrigation stops completely on all public parks, gardens and playing fields, unless they are supplied with groundwater supplies.

Council is working towards increasing the number of green spaces and sporting fields that are able to be watered using groundwater and not treated water.

### ***Do you put restrictions on just to save water for all the Festival visitors in January?***

No. Country Music visitors don't use an enormous amount of water. If Tamworth's water consumption over all 365 days of the year is averaged out evenly, taking into account season, dry conditions and water restrictions, the Festival adds around an extra three of these average days of consumption. Visitors to the Festival don't bring gardens with them, which is generally the largest use of residential water.

Visitors are always informed through Council promotional campaigns that water restrictions are in place and even if not, visitors are always encouraged to have a comfortable and enjoyable stay, but to use water as efficiently as possible.

When restrictions are in place visitors are asked not to use portable pools, wash vehicles, and take shorter showers. Many visitors are coming from places that are under water restrictions and general visitors are happy to comply.

### ***Why don't you use the old Peel drift wells?***

In 2007 six of the old Scott Road or Peel Drift wells were rehabilitated. These wells can now be used to supply water for Tamworth; however that use is controlled by a license issued by the State Government.

The License restricts when water can be accessed at the wells and how much water can be accessed. Generally the wells can only be used for supplementing other water sources during certain periods and during periods of drought.

### ***Why don't you hold more water in the dam when it's there and keep applying restrictions?***

Just because Council is not taking water from the dam doesn't mean the water is going to be stored in the dam for when Council wants to use it. Chaffey Dam is not owned by Council, it is owned and operated by Water NSW.

Water NSW has a number of customers who access water from Chaffey Dam including Council. SO if the water in the dam is not used by Council it can be sold to other customers. So if continuing to apply restrictions does not result in any water saving at Chaffey Dam why would you apply them?

Further, Council can't overstep its power and authority. Council can only legally enforce water restrictions through the *1993 Local Government Act* during periods of low supply. Water restrictions are a legal mechanism through which people can face financial penalties and restrictions of their water flow.

Individuals can be fined \$220 if found to be in breach of water restrictions and can have a flow restrictor fitted which they will be charged \$160 install and \$160 to remove after they begin to comply.

For water restrictions to be effective they must be legally enforceable, but Council only has the power and authority to enforce them when supply levels are low. Council can't give a resident a \$220 fine for using a hose to water their geraniums when the dam is 70% full.

Just because the water is there doesn't mean you have to use it. Council is consistently educating residents and staff on achieving and maintaining water sustainability and efficiency across the region, even when restrictions are not applied.

### ***We're on restrictions again, why did you let people use sprinklers for so long?***

There are various factors for why water supply levels drop, particularly in Chaffey Dam. The first factor to consider is that there are other customers using the dam as a water source. Chaffey Dam is not owned by Council it is owned and operated by Water NSW. Water NSW has a number of customers who access water from Chaffey Dam including Council. So if the water in the dam is not used by Council it can be sold to other customers.

Rainfall is another factor that affects how much water is being used. If there is a lot of rainfall in the catchment and surrounding area the dam is continually topped up and irrigators don't need to access the water because their farms are soaked from rainfall. When there is little rainfall, and the weather is hot, irrigators want to use their full allocations and the dam level begins to drop quickly.

Likewise, residents also use more during these hotter, drier periods. Evaporation during hotter weather is also a factor in drops in the dam level. The Tamworth region has what is known as a variable climate, meaning that amounts of rainfall change over long cycles. The dam level doesn't drop just because people were allowed to use sprinklers for an extended period of time.

It is also important to realise Council's Drought Management Plan is a plan to ensure Tamworth and other centres do not run out of water during drought, it is not a Plan to maintain raw water supplies at their highest level always. Residents who want to have a nice garden should be able to do so when water levels permit.

### ***Why don't you come up with some sort of plan or strategy for water?***

Council does have a long term plan for managing access to its seven water supplies across the region. The three key documents for Council's management of water are the Demand Management Plan, the Drought Management Plan and the Water Sustainability Strategy.

The Drought Management Plan is used to ensure no centre runs out of water during drought periods. The Demand Management Plan details how Council will educate and offer incentives to business and the general public about saving water and thereby reducing demand and the Water Sustainability Strategy provides more detailed programs for improving water sustainability.

### ***What is Council doing about people who don't do the right thing?***

Water restrictions are legally enforceable under the *1993 Local Government Act* and Council can issue a \$220 fine to residents who are found to be in breach of its current water restrictions. Following a fine residents can then have a flow restrictor fitted which they will be charged t \$160 install and \$160 to remove after they begin to comply.

Whilst Council does carry out inspections when water restrictions are in place to ensure compliance, Council also relies on reports from the general public about non-compliance with water issues. However, before taking action and possibly fining residents Council prefers to give residents the benefit of the doubt and/or the opportunity to be educated as to how the water restrictions system works.

For instance, a new resident may have just moved from somewhere where water restrictions are not a major issue. Likewise, some residents may believe that compliance with water restrictions is

optional. Further some residents are involved in neighbourly disputes which result in them being wrongly reported for not complying with water restrictions.

In order to allow for these situations and to alert residents to the significance of the situation Council issues a series of first and second warning letters to those witnessed to be in breach of restrictions. These can be reported by both staff or other residents. Residents can remain anonymous for the first two reports when the warning letters are issued, but if the situation escalates to the point where fines need to be issued, that resident will need to sign a witness statement and a document stating their willingness to stand in court as a witness.

This is done through Council's Compliance section, which can issue fines on the spot to residents who have already received their two warnings at a particular address.

### ***Why doesn't Council build a bigger dam?***

Chaffey Dam is owned, operated, managed and controlled by the State Government water authority known as Water NSW. In mid-2014 construction commenced under a Federal, State and Council partnership funding project to augment the volume of Chaffey Dam from 62 gigalitres to 102 gigalitres.

Construction has now been completed. Modelling undertaken by Council shows this augmentation will help secure long term water supplies for Tamworth including allowing for continued growth and improve the security of water entitlements for downstream users. The \$50 million Chaffey Dam project was funded by the Australian Government's National Water Security Plan for Cities and Towns (\$18.145 million), the NSW Government (\$27.668 million) and Tamworth Regional Council (\$3.968 million).

Dungowan Dam is owned and operated by Council, but this is a comparatively small dam. Whilst modelling shows the augmented Chaffey Dam will cater for Tamworth for the next 20-30 years Council wanted to start considering where additional water would come from for the period after that. As a result consultants were engaged to look at a variety of long term options, one of which was the possibility of constructing a larger Dungowan Dam. In June 2016 the Federal Government announced a commitment for an \$850,000 feasibility study into a new and larger dam on Dungowan Creek. This study will be undertaken by Water NSW.

It is also important to recognise that just because we have enough water for the next 20-30 years it does not mean we will never have periods where water restrictions are appropriate to conserve supply. However modelling indicates water restriction in Tamworth should only be required every 10 years.

### ***Why don't you explore other options for capturing water?***

An investigation into further improving the reliability and sustainability of Tamworth city's raw water supply, following the completion of the Chaffey Dam augmentation, has recommended four options be examined further. Since November 2014, Tamworth Regional Council has been investigating a range of options along with water engineering consultant Hunter H2O. Councillors endorsed the Tamworth Bulk Water - Long Term Options Review report tabled at the December 15 meeting which recommended a more detailed investigation of four options:

- Transferring water from Keepit Dam via a 62km pipeline
- Upgrading Dungowan Dam from 6 gigalitres to between 20-25 gigalitres
- A 10-15 gigalitre off-river storage upstream of Tamworth
- Accessing more ground (bore) water through further use of Peel River Drift Wells and an additional bore field to be developed 26km downstream of Tamworth

The report explained the other 20 possible options identified were generally considered not economical or did not provide any advantage over the preferred options. Council is currently

exploring the availability of Federal Government grants to finance these options, and will partner with the NSW Government to submit an Expression of Interest to seek funds to further investigate the four preferred options. Modelling of Tamworth's existing water supplies has shown that with the augmentation of Chaffey Dam to increase its storage capacity from 62 gigalitres to 102 gigalitres there will be sufficient water to meet Tamworth's demand for the next 20-30 years, including allowances for growth.

Chaffey Dam is the main source of the water supply for Tamworth city. This does not mean Tamworth will be free from water restrictions during periods of low rainfall in the future, but the increased volume of water storage should result in less frequent restrictions than we have experienced historically and with the new Drought Management Plan it will mean the city should not run out of water during a prolonged drought.

### ***Why do you continue to allow more houses in Tamworth when there's no water?***

Modelling of Tamworth's existing water supplies has shown that with the augmentation of Chaffey Dam to increase its storage capacity from 62 gigalitres to 100 gigalitres there will be sufficient water to meet Tamworth's demand for the next 20-30 years, including allowances for growth. In June 2016 the Federal Government announced a commitment for an \$850,000 feasibility study into a new and larger dam on Dungowan Creek. The project was submitted by the NSW government under the National Water and Infrastructure Development Fund.

### ***Why do you let business and industry start up here and use our water?***

Business and industry setting up or continuing to operate in the Tamworth region means jobs and economic growth. Council has never had to restrict business, industrial or commercial water usage. Modelling of Tamworth's existing water supplies has shown that with the augmentation of Chaffey Dam to increase its storage capacity from 62 gigalitres to 100 gigalitres there will be sufficient water to meet Tamworth's demand for the next 20-30 years, including allowances for growth.

### ***Why don't you restrict the water business and industry is using?***

Business, industry and commercial operations are the last water users to be restricted under Council's Drought Management Plan. Restricting water usage for business and industry has the potential to reduce production or operations which leads to a reduction in jobs.

During periods of low water supply the Drought Management Plan begins by restricting water for non-essential activities like maintaining green lawns or topping up swimming pools in order to conserve it for business and industry and indoor residential use. If water supplies become too low, business and industry is then restricted and water is conserved for critical human needs such as drinking, cleaning and cooking.

Council has previously conducted water usage audits on businesses by using independent water operations consultants to provide advice on how these businesses could perhaps improve water efficiencies in their operations. To date Council has never had to restrict business, industrial or commercial water usage.

### ***Why don't you reuse effluent wastewater for parks and gardens?***

A cost-benefit analysis for bringing recycled effluent back from the Westdale Wastewater Treatment Plant was conducted during the designing of the plant. This cost-benefit analysis showed that the cost of further treating the water would be prohibitive against any sort of benefit for using recycled water on adjacent parks, gardens or playing fields.

A large amount of highly expensive infrastructure would also be required to deliver this water. Another factor making this difficult is that when using recycled effluent for irrigating parks, gardens

or playing fields, there needs to be a guarantee that there is no human contact during actual irrigation, which is a very difficult risk to minimise.

### ***Should Council reimburse me for my dead lawn or garden?***

Gardens in the Tamworth region should be designed or maintained knowing that Tamworth has a variable climate, meaning that amounts of rainfall we receive can change over long cycles. Residents' expectations of access to town water supplies to maintain gardens should be connected directly to this climate variability. We may go for several years with water supplies at high levels then enter a period of low rainfall and the need to restrict consumption of these supplies.

Council won't stop residents from planting large areas of green turf, but residents need to be aware that Council will restrict access to water from time to time when lack of rainfall does not replenish water supplies. Council strongly encourages residents to explore various waterwise or zero-water groundcover options such as:

- Mulched banks of indigenous native plants
- Packed earth paths and living areas
- Concrete paths and living areas
- Decorative gravel
- Paved areas
- Rockeries
- Artificial turf

Council also strongly urges residents to be self-sufficient to a certain degree when it comes to outside water usage by installing rainwater tanks that can be used to service plants or smaller areas of lawn.

### ***Can I still water my pets and animals on higher levels of restrictions?***

Council never restricts water used for animal health, as long as reasonable volumes are used as efficiently as possible. If animals can be bathed at less regular intervals on higher levels of restriction, this obviously assists in conserving water – but only if health and safety of both residents and animals is not compromised. The number of people drawing on the town water supply for stock or horse management is relatively low.

### ***Can I use water to fix health, safety and hygiene issues?***

Council never restricts water used for health, safety and hygiene purposes, even on the higher levels of restriction. If you believe water needs to be used to address a health, safety or hygiene issue, don't hesitate to use the water. This usually includes washing or cleaning bodily fluids or waste from humans or animals.

### ***If I pay my rates don't I have a right to use the water?***

Residents are billed for water in two ways. The first is an annual charge which is levied whether a resident or business uses treated water or not. The second is a consumption charge which is levied based on how much water is used at a premise. Water is only ever severely restricted during periods of low supply.

Restrictions as detailed in the Drought Management Plan are applied to ensure no centre ever runs out of water. If this were to occur everyone who uses water would be in a dire situation whether we paid our rates or not. Given you only pay for water that you consume, there is no direct financial loss to residents during water restrictions. There are indirect costs associated with water restrictions but these costs are considered minor when compared to the issues faced if Tamworth, for instance, was to run out of water.