NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT | Department of LOGISTICS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Darwin Region Water Supply Program
Community Update

January 2026

Welcome to 2026! As we commence another productive year, we wanted to recap on the outcomes and key milestones for the Darwin Region Water Supply Program (the Program). Stage 1 of the Program includes the return to service of Manton Dam and the planning and approvals for the Adelaide River Off-stream Water Storage (AROWS) project. Together, these projects will deliver a reliable, sustainable water supply now and into the future to support our growing communities, our lifestyle and rebuild our economy.

Manton Dam Return to Service

In 2025, the Manton Dam Return to Service project continued to make strong progress toward reinstating a critical water source for the Darwin region. With major construction activities advancing to schedule, the project is contributing to improved system reliability and strengthened long-term water security for the region.

Work at the Manton Dam site is now nearing completion, with major components nearing finalisation. The inlet tower upgrade is more than 90% complete, the new pump station building is finished, and the 22 km pipeline connecting Manton Dam to the network has been fully installed, with testing currently underway. These upgrades play an important role towards safely bringing Manton Dam back online as a reliable water source.

Substantial progress has also been made on Stage 1 of the Strauss Water Treatment Plant, which is essential to support the treatment of water from Manton Dam before it is transferred to the greater Darwin supply. The water treatment process building has been constructed, with the major concrete structures and water tanks complete. Other key site works including access roads and earthworks were also finished before the wet season. With the main process building complete, electrical and mechanical fit-out is well underway and will continue during the coming month. The Dissolved Air Flotation over Filters (DAFF) plant structure is also complete, with internal filter beds currently being installed. These works will support the delivery of a drinking water supply that meets the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

Several key management plans are also nearing completion with the project team collaborating with several key stakeholders to understand priorities and expectations. The Recreation Management Plan, Catchment Management Plan and Heritage Management Plan will support how Manton Dam reservoir and its broader catchment area are managed into the future. Each plan has been developed to ensure community values, safety considerations and heritage protection are appropriately embedded. For the safety of visitors and the drinking water supply, access to the spillway, boardwalk at the base of the dam wall and the surrounding operational area is closed to the public. Recreational access to the boat ramp and picnic access areas will remain open to the public.

The Manton Dam Return to Service project is on track for completion and commissioning by mid-2026, contributing to a safe, reliable and resilient water supply for the Darwin region.

AROWS Project

The AROWS project achieved significant progress in 2025, contributing toward the advancement of the Territory's long-term water security through key technical, environmental and cultural milestones. Last year's work strengthened the project's evidence base and partnerships and positioned AROWS for the next phase of planning and design. The year began with a major step in the environmental approvals process, with the project's environmental referral submitted and publicly exhibited. Following consultation, the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority approved the Terms of Reference for the project, providing a clear and structured framework for progressing the project's environmental impact assessment. This early clarity supports a transparent, sequenced approach to future studies and ensures regulatory expectations are well understood.

Building on this, the project completed Stage 1 of the Regional Monitoring Bore Network, installing 17 bores across the project area to establish a comprehensive groundwater dataset for the AROWS basin. Planning for Stage 2 is now underway, which will extend monitoring coverage, improve long-term visibility of groundwater behaviour and provide critical inputs to groundwater modelling and environmental assessments.

The project has also advanced key scientific investigations, completing further flora, fauna and aquatic surveys, as well as wet-season water-quality sampling across the basin and broader catchment. These studies continue to strengthen understanding of surface water hydrology and water quality, seasonal dynamics and ecological conditions and will directly inform future environmental assessments and regulatory processes.

The concept design for the AROWS project has been underway, and provides a structured definition of the proposed project's key infrastructure components and how they may function together. This early design phase integrates initial engineering with preliminary hydrology, geotechnical insights, environmental and cultural constraints, and land tenure considerations to confirm that the proposed project remains technically viable.

Once complete, the concept design will establish a baseline that can be tested and refined, prior to the Reference Design being finalised. The outputs from this early concept work will inform the next phases of design and assessments that will support future investment decisions.

We continue to work in close collaboration with Traditional Owners, whose cultural knowledge and guidance have been central to survey planning and the identification and ongoing protection of culturally significant areas. Their partnership continues to support a culturally informed approach to project development and improves confidence in the long-term management of the project area.

Moving solidly into the new year, the achievements of 2025 have strengthened AROWS' technical foundation to clarify future design and assessment pathways and have enhanced the environmental data and cultural insight needed to support the project's proposed future stages. The project is well positioned to progress the detailed planning, investigations and engagement required to inform future investment decisions and progress the development of a new water source that will underpin a reliable and sustainable water future for the Northern Territory.

Community Reference Group

The Community Reference Group continued to play a vital role in to the project, meeting formally in July 2025 to provide valuable insights and strengthen connections with industry and community across the Program. The meeting fostered constructive discussion and collaboration and was supported by a site visit to Manton Dam and the Strauss Water Treatment Plant in September, offering members the opportunity to witness firsthand the significant progress being made. This experience not only deepened their understanding of the works underway but also highlighted how these advancements will contribute to the resilience and success of the broader water infrastructure system. Their ongoing engagement ensures the project remains firmly grounded in community perspectives and priorities.

Unfortunately, due to Cyclone Fina, the intended meeting for November had to be rescheduled. Despite this setback, our Community Reference Group continue to share information on the Program through their relevant networks. The Group's next meeting is scheduled for February and we are looking forward to another productive year ahead.

For further information on the Community Reference Group, visit
watersecurity.nt.gov.au/darwin-region-water-supply/community-engagement

Contact information

For further information, contact the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure on 08 8999 5106 or email to Waterinfrastructure.DLI@nt.gov.au. You can also visit our website at www.watersecurity.nt.gov.au

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