



13 September 2024

Hunter Water welcomes planning approval for permanent Belmont Desalination Plant

Hunter Water welcomes the NSW Government's announcement that the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure has issued planning approval for a permanent Desalination Plant at Belmont. The State Significant Infrastructure is a crucial step in securing the Lower Hunter's water supply for generations to come.

Hunter Water expects to start building the Plant later this year, and once complete, it will add up to 30 million litres per day of rainfall-independent drinking water capacity to Hunter Water's system, or about 15 per cent of the region's average daily needs.

Hunter Water Managing Director, Darren Cleary, said the Belmont Desalination Plant is a priority project for Hunter Water to deliver, producing safe and reliable drinking water regardless of changes in weather or climate.

"We can't rely on rain alone anymore. We know our region's water storages can fall from typical operating levels to critical levels in less than three years so if a severe drought continued beyond three years, our region could run out of water.

"As a key action in the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan, the Belmont Desalination Plant will be an enduring, integrated, and vital part of the Lower Hunter's water supply system.

Mr Cleary said the planning approval for a permanent desalination plant has given greater certainty of water supply for the region while Grahamstown Dam's storage is temporarily lowered to address earthquake-related risks. In July 2024, the top water level in Grahamstown Dam was lowered to around 90% as an immediate action to reduce the risks to downstream communities should an earthquake damage the dam.

"With the Belmont Desalination Plant planning approval announced and construction soon to start, Hunter Water has confirmed it is taking further steps to increase community safety downstream of Grahamstown Dam.

"The interim top water level in Grahamstown Dam will be further reduced from the current 12 metres Australian Height Datum (AHD) to 11.5 metres AHD, or about 82% capacity so that the risk to the community near the dam is even lower in the event of an earthquake that damages the dam's embankments.

"Our overall maximum storage capacity for all water storages in the region will be 88% and today it is 90.7%, a healthy position to be in as we enter the warmer, drier months of the year.

"We are already exploring the necessary engineering upgrades to the dam's embankments so they can be strengthened against an earthquake, but delivering upgrades will take five to 10 years.

"The Belmont Desalination Plant diversifies our water sources assisting us in managing the region's water security while Grahamstown Dam's top water level is reduced," Mr Cleary said.

Hunter Water anticipates investing \$530 million to design and construct the permanent Belmont Desalination Plant, with construction expected to take approximately four years.

The Plant's funding will be incorporated in Hunter Water's pricing submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal.

New Hunter Water prices commence from 1 July 2025.



Media Release

Hunter Water

To learn more about the Belmont Desalination Plant, head to www.hunterwater.com.au/desal

For information about Grahamstown Dam and the risk assessment report and reduced water level, visit www.hunterwater.com.au/grahamstown

To understand the process of setting customer bills for the period 2025-2030, visit www.hunterwater.com.au/pricing

*Australian Height Datum (AHD) is the height of a point above average sea level.

Chris White | Media line: 02 4979 9669 | media@hunterwater.com.au