

**The Hon Susan Close MP**  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Climate, Environment and Water

Tuesday, 4 March 2025

## **Emergency response to extreme dry conditions in the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu region**

I rise to advise the House on the current water supply situation in the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu region.

The South Australian Government is acutely aware that the last 12 months have seen rainfall at the lowest levels on record across multiple areas of the State. In response, the Government has been working with the primary production sector to support drought-affected farmers and communities through an \$18 million drought support package, which was announced by the Premier and Minister Scriven late last year.

In addition to the devastating impact on farming communities, unprecedented dry conditions are now also putting the domestic water supplies of some off-grid households at risk, most notably in the broader Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu region where current demands for water carting services significantly exceed supply.

According to the Bureau of Meteorology, over the last 12 months parts of the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu region have seen their lowest rainfall on record for any 12-month period. Last year was also Adelaide's driest year since the Millennium Drought, with only 289.6 mm of rain recorded over the 12 months to 31 January 2025, or just over half of Adelaide's average annual rainfall.

In this context, Minister Champion recently announced that production from the Adelaide Desalination Plant would be ramped up until mid-2025. This will ensure that SA Water's customers in Metropolitan Adelaide and connected areas will continue to have a consistent water supply throughout this period without the need for restrictions. This shows the importance of planning ahead and investing in fit-for-purpose water security infrastructure for the long-term.

However, across the broader Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu region there are many households that are not connected to a mains water supply. In such cases, there is always a risk that natural rainwater and/or local groundwater sources will not be

sufficient to meet an individual household's needs when conditions remain dry or extremely dry for extended periods.

Off-grid households have traditionally relied on water carting businesses when needing to top up their domestic water supplies. Water carters who provide drinking water supplies are required to be registered with SA Health and there are a range of operators who provide this service on a commercial basis throughout the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu region, as well as in other parts of the State.

As a result of the extreme dry conditions, there have been reports of very high levels of demand for water carters in the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu region, as well as reports of people having to cart in water for the first time after more than 30 years on their properties. There are also reports that these demands significantly exceed the current capacity of the water carting sector, resulting in increased waiting times for some households and no guarantees that water will be available before people run dry.

I would like to take this opportunity to personally commend the water carters for the extraordinary way that they are responding to this emergency situation. Unfortunately, I have heard reports of isolated instances of people being abusive to the water carters when they have not been able to deliver water exactly when requested. The current situation is clearly not the fault of the water carters and they are doing their best in a difficult situation. I would ask that people please remain courteous towards these businesses, most of which are small and family-owned, who have really stepped up to help people in their time of need.

I would also like to applaud the great leadership and community spirit being demonstrated by the local community. I am aware of instances where local sporting groups have opened their clubrooms to provide their locals with a place to shower and individuals who have offered to open their homes and their taps to people in need. It is really heartening to see the community coming together to support each other in these difficult times.

It is important to note that the situation we are dealing with in the Hills and Fleurieu is not an overall issue of water security – sufficient volumes of water are currently available to meet domestic supply in this region – the issue that is really affecting off-grid households in this area is the current inability of the water transport market to meet their demands for supply.

To help overcome this supply deficit, the South Australian Government is moving to provide additional emergency supply options in the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu region for those that have no other means of accessing water. The Government will seek to do this in partnership with local government and in a way that complements the crucial ongoing role of the water carting sector, similar to other local government areas across the state.

To bring this into effect the Government will be taking the following steps:

1. Through SA Water, the Government will initially establish temporary, user-pays bulk water collection points at three separate locations across the Adelaide Hills, being:

- Ridge Road, Woodside
- Koennecke Road, Sandergrove
- Peggy Buxton Road, Brukunga.

A fourth temporary bulk water collection point is also being considered for the southern Fleurieu in or around Aldinga.

I stress that this is a temporary emergency response only to help address the current overwhelming demand on the water carting industry.

2. Where water carters report bottlenecks affecting their ability to take bulk water, SA Water will work with them to identify alternative sites for extraction where possible.
3. The Government is working to link water carters with transport supply companies to provide for additional delivery truck capacity to support the water carting sector during these unprecedented times.
4. Through SA Health, the Government will support potential new carters who are seeking to enter the sector to assist in the current situation. The Department for Environment and Water will assist in facilitating discussions between new carters and SA Health to ensure that potential entrants are registered promptly, provided the relevant information requirements are addressed.
5. From a longer-term perspective, the Government is working with local councils to explore a range of potential measures to help educate and support off-grid households on how to improve their water security and better prepare for future dry periods.

With respect to the temporary user-pays bulk water collection points, the locations of these have been determined by taking into account the capacity of SA Water's mains network to safely supply water at the rate and volume required, as well as considerations of safe vehicle access. Commencing Thursday, the temporary bulk water collection points will be staffed by SA Water personnel from 7am to 7pm, 7 days a week. Usage will also be monitored carefully and operation hours may be adjusted in response to demand.

For those who cannot obtain timely access to water supplies from a water carter, these temporary bulk water collection points are intended to provide a source of emergency supply that allows households to collect water for domestic purposes. The bulk water collection points are not intended for commercial stock or watering gardens. While the bulk water collection point water will be of drinking water quality, there are measures that must be taken to ensure it remains drinkable once it leaves the pipe, including the type of container that is used to transport the water to the property. If these are not food-grade, then the water will require treatment, such as boiling, prior to drinking.

It must also be emphasised that the temporary emergency steps being implemented by the State Government have been designed to support the water carting industry respond to the current unprecedented level of demand and do not relieve off-grid households from their responsibility to carefully monitor and pro-actively manage their own water supplies. With climate change, we expect to see longer and more frequent

periods of hot and dry weather. It is critical that households and businesses plan ahead for extreme conditions. While some off-grid households may have been able to rely on their existing rainwater storages or groundwater supplies in the past, this may not be the case in the future. Just as households in bushfire risk areas plan ahead for bushfire, off-grid households will need to be prepared for more frequent extended periods of little to no rain.

Finally, there has been talk in the community about the need to introduce water restrictions in metropolitan Adelaide. I can confirm that, with the current operation of the Adelaide Desalination Plant, there is sufficient water supply for those connected to the SA Water mains network. This will not change as a result of the Government's efforts to address the current inability of the water carting market to meet the demand from off-grid households in the broader Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu region.