

VicSport Update: February 2008

New Water Allocation System for Sports Grounds

3A Water Restrictions have been in place since April 2007 and are guaranteed until at least June 2008. Under 3A Restrictions councils have been able to water '1 in 4' sporting grounds, which has been beneficial in terms of councils maintaining at least 25% of their grounds and sport and recreational groups being able to access facilities. However under the '1 in 4' arrangement councils have found that this is not necessarily the most efficient use of water available to them, given that the pressing issue for many councils is the need to convert grounds to summer grass and that conversion needs to happen over the spring and early summer period.

Councils have previously suggested if they could receive the same amount of water, which is equivalent to watering '1 in 4' as an 'allocation' they could achieve better management and conversion of their grounds with some councils estimating that they could convert 6-8 grounds per season rather than the 2-3 grounds which is currently the case.

In response the Water Exemptions Committee, made up of representatives of each of the Water Boards, have recently introduced (February 2008) a voluntary system of Water Allocations for Sports Facilities (not including parks, gardens or open public space). An initiative which is a major boost for community sport and recreation in Victoria.

Under this allocation system councils may apply to their water authority to water any irrigated sports facility under it's control but must not exceed the water allocation issued to it by the water authority. In order to be granted an allocation council need to have a water meter installed at each ground and must have a Water Conservation Plan (WCP) in place that is submitted to and approved by the authority.

The key components of the Water Conservation Plan councils must submit are:

- Provide refurbishment plans for ovals requiring transition to drought tolerant grasses by July 2008, with the target to have all grounds transitioned within 3 years
- Put in place a plan for installation of check water meters where required
- Complete an audit of efficiency of irrigation systems by July 2008
- Monthly monitoring and reporting of water consumption to the water authority
- Community communications plan including publishing watering details on line and displaying signage at grounds.

Some key components of the allocation system include:

- Approval for water allocations may be revoked by the water utility at any time and no longer applies when a higher stage of restrictions is imposed.
- The water allocation plan is optional and councils can elect to remain on the existing '1 in 4' arrangement if they desire.
- Allocations are calculated using consumption data from existing watering arrangements during the 3 & 3A time period from January to December 2007.
- Councils will be provided with a pro rate allocation from the time their application is approved until 30 June 2008. Should 3A restrictions continue beyond June 2008 a further allocation will be made for 2007/2008 based on the 2007 consumption.
- It is expected that water authorities will be able process council applications within 5-10 business days.

Current water restrictions have had a significant impact on grounds across all municipalities. VicSport has consulted with numerous councils in metropolitan and regional areas and the information gathered indicates that grounds are in no better condition than at the same time last year, with most councils consulted reporting that grounds had in fact deteriorated. A move towards water allocations as outlined within this plan will allow councils to better manage the water available to them and to accelerate the rate of transition to drought resistant turf; in doing so ensure long term community access to fields and ovals.