



MOUNT BARKER
DISTRICT COUNCIL

2026 - 2030 Integrated Water Action Plan



Acknowledgement of Country

Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands of the Mount Barker District. We respect the First Nations people and their spiritual relationship with their country and their cultural and heritage beliefs.



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Prepared by Climate Cavalry

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Our 2044 vision To be the most liveable region in South Australia.

Which means...

“A liveable place is somewhere that is: safe, attractive, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable; with affordable and diverse types of housing, public open space, local shops, health and community services, leisure and cultural opportunities; with opportunities for employment and education all accessible by convenient public transport, walking and cycling.”

— Australian Urban Observatory, 2024

Our five pillars to achieve this are...



Executive Summary

Water is a critical and increasingly constrained resource for the Mount Barker District. Rapid population growth, expanding urban development and climate change are placing growing pressure on stormwater systems, waterways, irrigation demands and downstream environments. How water is planned, managed and reused will be central to water security, reliability, reducing flood risk, supporting liveability, protecting ecosystems and managing long-term infrastructure costs.

The Integrated Water Action Plan 2026–2030 is Council’s four-year implementation plan to deliver the Environment and Sustainability Strategy objective to conserve water and use it wisely. Implement water sensitive urban design practices to support the ecology, greening and liveability of urban areas. The Plan brings together stormwater, water efficiency and waterway health into a single framework to support better decision-making and delivery across the organisation.

Key priorities

- Strengthen stormwater and flood management
- Support greater uptake of WSUD
- Maximise water efficiency in public spaces
- Optimise Council’s treated water use

This Integrated Water Action Plan is one of five interlinked action plans nested under Council’s Environment and Sustainability Strategy. Many actions in this Plan are closely connected to priorities in the other action plans, recognising that water outcomes are inseparable from cooling, biodiversity, resilience and liveability.

The Plan has been developed building on established evidence, previous Council strategies and regional climate initiatives. Detailed background information is referenced separately, allowing this Action Plan to remain focused on actions and delivery.

The actions in this Plan contribute to Council’s 2035 water targets, including:

- An increase in the use of recycled water to support water dependent ecosystems, irrigation of public open space, street trees and for agricultural activities within the district.
- Where water is a consideration, integrate water-sensitive urban design principles into at least 95% of Council’s new capital and renewal projects by 2035.

A summary of the priority actions is provided overpage. Over the next four years, this Plan will guide practical, coordinated action to improve flood resilience, water efficiency and waterway health, and to manage water as a shared and valuable resource as Mount Barker continues to grow.



Integrated Water Action Plan

Summary of Actions and Strategic Alignment

REF	ACTION	CONTRIBUTE TO ESS PRIORITIES			
		STRENGTHEN STORMWATER AND FLOOD MANAGEMENT	SUPPORT GREATER UPTAKE OF WSUD	MAXIMISE WATER EFFICIENCY IN PUBLIC	OPTIMISE COUNCIL'S TREATED WATER USE
Governance, policy and processes					
W1	Integrated Water Design Toolkit	X	X	X	X
Track, plan and manage					
W2	Climate-informed stormwater management planning	X	X	X	
W3	Improve water use and WSUD tracking		X	X	X
W4	Improve irrigation asset planning			X	X
Educate, inspire and involve					
W5	Promote water-wise practices		X	X	
Protect and maintain					
W6	Strengthen waterway compliance	X			
W7	Integrated water capability and maintenance standards	X	X	X	
Establish, expand or restore					
W8	Deliver priority stormwater management projects	X	X		
Partnerships and advocacy					
W9	Watercourse rehabilitation	X	X		
W10	Partner on regional water security planning and best practice	X	X		X
W11	Partner with Landscape Board on waterway health	X			

Introduction

The Integrated Water Management Action Plan sets out Council's priority actions to plan, manage and use water more effectively over the next four years.

It focuses on practical measures to reduce flood risk, improve water efficiency, security, protect waterways and support liveability as the district grows, in line with Council's Environment and Sustainability Strategy and broader state policy directions. The Plan identifies where Council will lead through its own planning, assets and operations, and where partnerships and shared responsibility are essential to achieve integrated outcomes.

The Plan includes the following areas of water action:

Integrated water management

Integrated water management recognises that stormwater, wastewater, potable water, groundwater and waterways are part of a connected system that is complex to manage. This Plan promotes coordinated planning and delivery to manage flood risk, support water security, protect ecosystems and maximise multiple benefits from water investments across townships and catchments.

Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD)

WSUD integrates water considerations into urban design and development, using natural systems and green infrastructure to slow, store, treat and reuse water. This includes measures such as rain gardens, detention basins, permeable surfaces and integrated irrigation, supporting cooling, waterway health and more resilient public spaces.

This Integrated Water Management Action Plan is the first standalone water action plan for the district. It brings together water-related actions that have previously sat across multiple plans into a single, coordinated framework, responding to growth, climate pressures and rising expectations around water-sensitive, nature-positive outcomes.

The Plan covers the period 2026–2030. Actions will be implemented, monitored and reviewed through Council's existing planning, asset management and reporting processes, with progress informing future updates to Council strategies, master plans and delivery programs.

Guiding Principles

Our District's environment supports a liveable, resilient, thriving and creative community. That's why we value it so highly. These endorsed principles from the Environment and Sustainability Strategy establish the foundation for Council's approach, actions and decision-making.

A better future together

Council will work proactively with First Nations, community groups, developers, landholders, the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board (HFLB) and other partners – and embed action across Council – to amplify shared efforts and outcomes.

Celebrate, empower and inspire

We seek to inspire a love of nature and sustainable living by telling stories, celebrating our assets and achievements, connecting people and nature, sharing knowledge, and empowering people to act.

Protect and prioritise nature

We will protect and connect wildlife habitats and grow protected areas, prioritising planting indigenous species where practical, because healthy ecosystems are vital to a thriving community.

Take urgent climate action

Council will take immediate and ambitious action on the climate emergency, working with the community to reduce our impact and adapt to increased storms, heat, bushfires, flood and drought.

Be bold yet practical

Council will take bold action on immediate priorities, learning and improving along the way. Our efforts will be practical, evidence-based and achievable, with clear pathways to success. Council will lead by example, pursue best practice, and advocate for positive change.

Strategic Framework

Council's strategic framework

The Integrated Water Action Plan 2026–2030 is a four-year action plan nested under Council's Environment and Sustainability Strategy and supports delivery of Council's Community Plan vision and priorities.

This Action Plan forms part of a suite of five interlinked four-year action plans under the Environment and Sustainability Strategy, alongside:

- Climate Change
- Waste to Resources
- Township Greening
- Nature and Wildlife

Together, these action plans provide an integrated approach to improving environmental outcomes, reducing risk and enhancing liveability. Many actions in this Plan align with and reinforce actions in the other plans, recognising that climate resilience, emissions reduction, greening, water management and biodiversity outcomes are interdependent.

This Plan also connects with and supports implementation of other Council strategies and plans, including (but not limited to):

- Open Space Management
- Strategic Asset Management Plans
- Long Term Financial Plan
- Emergency Management Plan
- Public Health and Wellbeing planning
- Advocacy Plan



Figure 1: Strategic context

Alignment with state and national policy

The Integrated Water Management Action Plan aligns with relevant South Australian and Australian Government policy and legislative frameworks relating to water security, flood risk management, urban development and environmental protection. This alignment helps ensure Council's actions are consistent with broader government direction and can respond to emerging regulatory requirements, funding opportunities and best practice over time.

Regional collaboration

Water management outcomes are strongly influenced by regional systems and shared catchments. Council works closely with GMB Water, the HFLB, SA Water, Water Sensitive SA and neighbouring councils to coordinate planning, share data and deliver projects that benefit both local communities and downstream environments.

Regional collaboration supports more effective use of resources, avoids duplication and strengthens technical capability, particularly for complex issues such as stormwater harvesting, flood mitigation, waterway health and WSUD standards. Actions in this Plan complement regional initiatives while remaining focused on Council's local role, responsibilities and assets.

Further reading

For more detail, please refer to the following resources available at www.mountbarker.sa.gov.au

- *Environment and Sustainability Strategy 2025*
Sets Council's long-term vision, objectives, guiding principles and priority focus areas for environment and sustainability, and provides the strategic framework.
- *State of the Environment Report 2024*
A detailed evidence base including the strategic and policy context, community values, benefits, emerging trends, status and review of progress since 2018 across key environmental themes.



Current Snapshot

Water is a critical and increasingly constrained resource for the Mount Barker District. How water is planned, used, managed and reused has direct implications for water security, flood risk, urban heat, ecosystem health, liveability, infrastructure costs and long-term resilience. Riparian vegetation along creeks and waterways also plays a critical role in bank stabilisation, habitat connectivity and water quality.

Mount Barker is one of South Australia's fastest-growing regions, with expanding townships, new greenfield development and increasing demand on water, wastewater and stormwater systems. Growth has increased the extent of impervious surfaces, altered natural drainage patterns and placed greater pressure on creeks, wetlands and downstream environments. Without coordinated planning, these trends can increase flood risk, degrade waterways and lock in higher long-term infrastructure and maintenance costs.

Climate change is amplifying existing water challenges. More intense rainfall events are increasing the risk of localised flooding, erosion and pollutant runoff, while hotter and drier conditions are placing pressure on water availability for human use, irrigation demands and urban vegetation. These compounding pressures highlight the need to manage water as a connected system, rather than as separate stormwater, wastewater and potable supply issues.

Responsibility for water management is shared across multiple organisations and landholders. Council plays a key role through land use planning, stormwater infrastructure, public open space management, compliance and community education, while GMB Water manages wastewater services. SA Water provides mains water supply to human settlements across the district while the HFLB manage water allocation planning for agriculture and other activities. Effective outcomes therefore rely on strong coordination, clear roles and partnerships with state agencies, utilities, developers and the community.

To date, water-related actions have been progressed through a range of plans, projects and partnerships. However, increasing growth, climate pressures and expectations around water-sensitive, nature-positive outcomes mean a more integrated and strategic approach is now required. This Action Plan brings water-related actions together into a single framework to better plan, prioritise and deliver integrated water management across the district.

Key Achievements to Date

Key recent achievements include:

Stormwater and flood management foundations

- Ongoing delivery of stormwater upgrades and maintenance to address localised flooding and drainage issues.
- Ongoing consideration of flood risk into land use planning and development assessment in growth areas.

New wastewater services

- Establishment of GMB Water to improve governance, accountability and long-term planning for wastewater services.

Embedding water-sensitive approaches

- Increasing use of Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) principles in selected capital works, streetscapes and open space projects.

Partnerships and regional collaboration

- Collaboration with the HFLB, SA Water and regional partners on waterway health, monitoring and on-ground works.
- Hosting and participating in Water Sensitive SA initiatives to build internal capability and share best practice.

While this is the first standalone Integrated Water Management Action Plan for the district, Council has long established water related planning, projects and partnerships.

The scale and complexity of water challenges are increasing as the district grows. This Action Plan responds by bringing water-related actions together into a coordinated, integrated framework, strengthening planning, capability and delivery to better manage water as a shared and valuable resource.



Objective

Conserve water and use it wisely. Implement water sensitive urban design practices to support the ecology, greening and liveability of urban areas.

Why this matters

Managing water effectively is essential to address the challenges of population growth, climate change, and increasing demand on finite water supplies. The district relies on the Murray River, where demand is projected to outstrip supply in the future. By adopting integrated water management approaches, we can conserve water, enhance liveability, and support water dependent ecosystems. Council plays a key role in flood mitigation, stormwater management, water-sensitive urban design (WSUD), and the treatment and sustainable use of wastewater. Expanding these efforts will help protect life and property, create greener, more liveable spaces, and support local industries by reusing treated water productively.

Related priorities and integration

Integrated water management underpins township greening and biodiversity outcomes, and supports climate resilience through flood mitigation, water security and WSUD. Water efficiency and reuse also link to emissions reduction and circular economy outcomes, particularly where energy and resource use can be reduced through smarter systems.

Key priorities

Strengthen stormwater and flood management

Protect life, property, infrastructure and ecosystems through effective stormwater and flood mitigation, linked to Council's asset management plans.

Support greater uptake of water-sensitive urban design (WSUD)

Enable, support and implement mature and targeted WSUD in Council and private developments to enhance liveability, biodiversity, and urban greening outcomes.

Maximise water efficiency in public spaces

Improve water use efficiency in Council-managed reserves and open spaces to conserve resources while maintaining amenity, urban cooling and ecological value.

Optimise Council's treated water use

Promote the use of Council recycled water as a valuable resource, supporting local agriculture and food production industries to drive economic growth, create employment opportunities, eliminate environmental disposal of treated water and improve outcomes for nature.

Actions

This section sets out the actions Council will deliver between 2026 and 2030.

Actions are organised into functional areas that reflect how Council operates, from strategy and decision-making, through to service delivery, partnerships and on-ground outcomes. Using a consistent functional structure across all action plans helps embed priorities into core business and supports coordinated implementation, monitoring and reporting. It also helps ensure responsibility, timing and budget allocations are aligned to the appropriate stage of work.

The actions listed are not intended to be exhaustive. They represent a prioritised set of actions where focused effort over the next four years will have the greatest impact in progressing Council's objectives and 'moving the needle' on outcomes, alongside the continued delivery of core services and existing programs.

Each action may contribute to multiple strategic priorities and may also support outcomes across other action plans, reflecting the interconnected nature of Council's work.

Governance, policy and processes

Establishing or updating the policies, frameworks and internal processes that guide Council decision-making and enable improved implementation.

Track, plan and manage

Building the evidence base, tools and systems needed to plan effectively, manage performance and support informed decisions over time.

Educate, inspire and involve

Supporting learning, engagement and participation to build capability, influence behaviour and enable action by Council and the community.

Protect and maintain

Managing risks, maintaining existing assets and services, and carrying out any relevant regulation roles.

Establish, expand or restore

Delivering new projects and on-ground actions that create or improve assets, services, systems or environments.

Partnerships and advocacy

Working with partners, stakeholders and other levels of government to align effort, leverage resources and influence outcomes beyond Council's direct control.

Integrated Water Actions Table

ACTION	KPI	INDICATIVE RESOURCING*	TIMING				LEAD	PLAN LINKS			
			26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30		C	R	G	N
Governance, Policy and Processes											
W1. Integrated Water Design Toolkit Develop a practical toolkit of approved integrated water designs for Council capital works, including concept designs and preliminary standard details developed internally, with external specialist input used to finalise detailed drawings where required.	Tool kit completed	Additional staff time and expert input \$11-\$50K		X	X		Infrastructure Planning	X		X	X
Track, Plan and Manage											
W2. Climate informed stormwater management planning Update stormwater management plans for Mount Barker, Totness and Littlehampton (followed by smaller townships) to incorporate climate change scenarios, township-scale studies and Integrated Water Management opportunities. <i>This includes assessing the merit of stormwater harvesting and reuse options for irrigation (where feasible), including site-specific investigations such as potential reuse of Mount Barker Creek in coordination with Laratinga Wetland planning, alongside prioritised upgrades, multi-use open space and flood resilience outcomes.</i>	SMPs updated	Additional staff time and Existing operational \$11-\$50K			X	X	Infrastructure Planning	X	X	X	X
W3. Improve water use and WSUD tracking Improve tracking of water use across Council facilities and irrigation systems (potable, recycled and bore) and implement a streamlined approach to record Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) features in Council capital projects to support reporting, maintenance planning and asset management.	Tracking completed annually	Additional staff time		X	X		Operations	X		X	
W4. Improve irrigation asset planning Review and update current and future irrigation needs at parks and reserves including through the use of recycled water. Update irrigation map, strengthen condition awareness and replacement program with focus on smart devices (eg. weather tracking, soil moisture probes, irrigation maps, ground water monitoring and condition monitoring).	Updated map and program	Additional staff time plus project \$11-\$50K				X	Operations	X		X	

ACTION	KPI	INDICATIVE RESOURCING*	TIMING				LEAD	PLAN LINKS			
			26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30		C	R	G	N
Educate, Inspire and Involve											
W5. Promote water-wise practices Deliver community education on watercourse care, rainwater tanks, greywater reuse, and water-wise gardening aligned with coordinated annual programs. Include showcasing basin-scale stormwater projects of master planned retention/detention basins to encourage more.	At least 4 activities or resources delivered per year	Existing staff time plus project \$1-\$10K	X	X	X	X	Strategic Planning	X		X	
Protect and Maintain											
W6. Strengthen waterway compliance Increase compliance effort on illegal discharges, sediment runoff from development sites and development controls to protect waterways, riparian vegetation, water quality and reduce flood risk.	>90% sites inspected are compliant	Additional staff time / expert support \$5-\$10K		X	X	X	City Development	X	X	X	X
W7. Integrated water capability and maintenance standards Build staff capability in integrated water management and WSUD across design, construction, and maintenance and improve WSUD handover and maintenance through cross-team inspections and clear service standards for silt and weed management across creeks, basins and detention areas.	WSUD maintenance standards adopted and at least one training session every 2 years	Additional staff time plus operational \$5-\$50K	X	X			Infrastructure Planning	X		X	X
Establish, Expand or Restore											
W8. Deliver priority stormwater management projects Deliver priority stormwater infrastructure and on-ground projects identified through updated stormwater management plans, subject to feasibility, funding and detailed design.	Priority projects progressed in line with adopted stormwater management plans	Existing staff time and Capital / Renewal plus seek grants	X	X	X	X	Infrastructure Planning	X	X	X	X
W9. Watercourse rehabilitation As resources and grant opportunities allow, progressively rehabilitate watercourses where they flow through Council-managed public land, including riparian vegetation, erosion control and weed management.	At least one watercourse rehabilitation project initiated by 2029	Existing staff time plus seek grants for delivery			X	X	Operations	X		X	X

ACTION	KPI	INDICATIVE RESOURCING*	TIMING				LEAD	PLAN LINKS			
			26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30		C	R	G	N
Partnerships and Advocacy											
W10. Partner on regional water security planning and best practice Collaborate with GMB Water, SA Water, regional water authorities, the HFLB, utilities, the EPA and Water Sensitive SA on regional water planning, stormwater harvesting, reuse, and WSUD best practice.	Participation in regional planning forums and WSUD collaboration activities delivered	Existing staff time plus project \$11-\$50K	X	X	X	X	Infrastructure Planning	X	X	X	X
W11. Partner with Landscape Board on waterway health Work collaboratively with the HFLB to share monitoring data, align priorities and support coordinated on-ground works that improve waterway condition, riparian vegetation and resilience in natural systems.	Data shared / joint initiatives progressed	Existing staff time	X	X	X	X	Operations	X			X

*Resourcing is indicative only and subject to annual budget processes. Existing staff time = action can be delivered within existing roles and workloads | Additional staff time = action is not currently resourced but may be delivered through reprioritisation or existing workloads | FTE establishment = delivery of action is expected to require new staff capacity, subject to future Council consideration and approval.

Implementation

The Integrated Water Action Plan 2026–2030 will be implemented through Council’s existing governance, planning and delivery processes. Actions will be led by nominated business units, with delivery supported through collaboration across Council where required.

Implementation will be staged over the four-year period, recognising that some actions focus on developing or updating policies, plans or tools, while others relate to delivery or on-ground outcomes. Where actions require additional resourcing, these will be considered through Council’s annual business planning and budget processes.

Council will actively seek to leverage external funding, partnerships and collaborative delivery opportunities to support implementation. This includes pursuing grants and joint initiatives with regional partners, State Government, research organisations and industry, particularly where shared challenges or economies of scale exist.

Delivery of this Plan will be coordinated alongside Council’s other Environment and Sustainability Strategy action plans to maximise alignment, manage dependencies and avoid duplication. Where appropriate, Council will adapt and build on existing tools, guidelines, policies and resources developed by Council or partner organisations, rather than duplicating effort. For example, shared templates, regional guidance or co-developed programs may be tailored to local needs.



Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

Progress against actions will be monitored internally on a regular basis, using the success measures identified for each action.

Key indicators, including waste generation, diversion, contamination and service performance, will be tracked over time and reported through existing corporate reporting mechanisms. This includes public reporting where appropriate, such as inclusion in Council's Annual Report and other relevant publications.

Water science, policy settings, funding opportunities and community expectations continue to evolve. Actions, priorities and delivery approaches may be refined over time in response to new evidence or data, changes in state or federal policy or targets, emerging risks or events and organisational learning and feedback.

Contribute towards 2035 targets

The actions in this Plan contribute to Council's longer-term integrated water management targets to 2035 in the Environment and Sustainability Strategy:

10. An increase in the use of recycled water to support water-dependent ecosystems, irrigation of public open space, street trees and agricultural activities within the district.

(In 2023, approximately 10% of Council wastewater generation was reused. This will be tracked annually, with refined targets to be established once the Mount Barker Region Wastewater Utility Subsidiary is operational.)

11. Where water is a consideration, integrate water-sensitive urban design principles into at least 95% of Council's new capital and renewal projects by 2035.

(Integration will be reviewed annually, with baseline tracking established through capital project reporting.)

Glossary of Terms

TERM	DEFINITION
Adaptation	Actions that help people, infrastructure, services and ecosystems adjust to climate impacts that are already occurring or locked in, to reduce harm and take advantage of emerging opportunities as the climate changes.
Biodiversity / biodiverse	The variety of all plants, animals and microorganisms, their genes, and the ecosystems they live in.
Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design (BSUD)	An approach to planning, design and development that seeks to protect, enhance and connect habitats, support native species, and embed nature into streets, buildings and public spaces alongside other urban functions.
Climate change	Long-term changes in temperature, rainfall patterns and the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, driven primarily by greenhouse gas emissions from human activities.
Ecosystem	A community of living organisms interacting with each other in their habitat.
Emissions	The release of gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, into the atmosphere from activities like burning fossil fuels
Impervious surface	A hard surface (such as a road or building) that prevents infiltration of water into the ground, causing water to run off the surface.
Infrastructure	Human-engineered structures like roads, buildings, footpaths and carparks.
Integrated water management	Collaborative planning and management of stormwater, wastewater and fresh water to deliver water security, public and environmental health, and urban amenity.
Resilient / resilience	Able to survive, adapt and thrive no matter what kind of chronic stresses and acute shocks are experienced.
Sustainable / sustainability	Responsibly managing our current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. This includes social, financial and environmental resources.
Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD)	Planning that manages the water cycle sustainably, promoting rainwater reuse, reducing runoff and incorporating green infrastructure.



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