

Managing a potentially hazardous dam

My dam has been in existence for many years without the need for a Licence to Operate Works, why do I need one now?

Victoria has about 450,000 dams, most operating on privately owned farms as a means to store rainfall for when it is needed. The vast majority of these dams do not require a Licence to Operate Works.

A small number of dams, owing to size or location, pose a potential risk to people or property if they were to fail. Changes to the legislation (*Section 67 1A of the Water Act 1989*) require all potentially hazardous dams to have a Licence to Operate Works.

This legislation came into effect in 2002. It was amended in 2006 to provide for an application fee set by the then Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI).

The licence provides you, and the wider community, assurance that any consequences associated with your farm dam are assessed, minimised and monitored.

What is a “potentially hazardous dam”?

A potentially hazardous dam is any dam on a waterway or a dam as described under *Section 67 (1A) of the Water Act 1989* as follows:

- The dam has a wall that is 5 metres or more high above ground level at the downstream end of the dam and a capacity of 50 megalitres or more; or
- The dam has a wall that is 10 metres or more high above ground level at the downstream end of the dam and a capacity of 20 megalitres or more; or
- The dam has a wall that is 15 metres or more high above ground level at the downstream end of the dam, regardless of the capacity; or
- The dam belongs to a prescribed class of dams.

Your existing licence document will indicate if the dam is on or off a waterway.

What is the purpose of licensing a potentially hazardous dam?

Dam owners need to be aware of their obligations to carry out ongoing maintenance and surveillance of their dams to avoid failure.

A Licence to Operate Works has conditions that require dam owners to take proper precautions to protect life and property.

A licence is required regardless of whether or not the dam is in use.

Are there specific licensing requirements for potentially hazardous dams?

Yes, a potentially hazardous dam must be assessed to determine the potential consequences of dam failure on people or property.

This assessment is based on guidelines established by the Australian National Committee on Large Dams (ANCOLD) and takes into account the consequences of dam failure including potential loss of life or the destruction of major infrastructure.

How long is a works licence valid for?

The operating licence term issued by GMW will depend on the dam consequence category:

The categories are:

On Waterway Dam (take & use licence Section 51):

Very Low or Low – issued for 15 years

Significant or High – Issued for 5 years

Farm Dam Registration:

Very Low to Low – issued for 20 years

Significant or High – issued for 5 years

What happens after I lodge my new or renewal application?

After you lodge your application, GMW will:

- Notify you in writing that the application has been received;
- Have one of our diversion inspectors contact you to arrange a site inspection;
- Notify you in writing if your application has been approved or refused. Please note that application fees are **not** refundable if an application is refused.

What is a Dam Safety Emergency Plan?

A Dam Safety Emergency Plan is a document containing procedures for dealing with an emergency as a result of the failure, or likely failure, of the dam, including:

- Identifying emergency conditions which could endanger the integrity of the dam and which require immediate action;
- Detailing procedures to be followed by the dam owner and operating personnel in the event of an emergency;
- Detailing procedures for alerting appropriate emergency agencies to enact protection measures for downstream communities.

What is a Dam Safety Surveillance Plan?

A Dam Safety Surveillance Plan contains procedures for the continuing monitoring of the condition of a dam and the review of its operation and maintenance. It determines whether a deficiency is developing or appears likely to develop.

A Dam Safety Surveillance Plan includes:

- A surveillance program specifying the recommended intervals for inspections to be completed by the dam owner. These inspections report on the structural integrity of the dam and the process for identifying and reporting changes in the condition of the dam.
- The dam owner (applicant) should review their Surveillance Plan every 12 months at a minimum or any time after a major rain event.

The Dam Safety Surveillance Plan will be reviewed by the GMW diversion inspector at each renewal of the licence.

How do I complete these plans and do I need an engineer?

Your Licence to Operate Works includes an assessment of your dam consequence category.

The categories are:

Very Low or Low consequence: If your dam has been assessed as being of very low or low consequence, you (the applicant) can complete the Dam Safety Emergency Plan

http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/176944/DamSafetyEmergencyPlan.pdf.

and a Dam Safety Surveillance Plan

http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0003/299181/CST_Dams_rcredits.docx

They are also located on the GMW website.

Significant or high consequence: If your dam has been assessed as being of significant or high consequence, you (the applicant) must engage a suitably qualified engineer to complete and/or endorse the Dam Safety Emergency Plan and a Dam Safety Surveillance Plan.

What is a “suitably qualified engineer”?

A suitably qualified engineer means a person eligible for membership of the Institution of Engineers Australia who is able to demonstrate competence in the design, construction and surveillance of dams.

You must lodge one copy of your Dam Safety Emergency Plan and a copy of Dam Safety Surveillance Plan to GMW once you have been issued with a Licence to Operate Works and every 12 months thereafter.

Inspection and monitoring records must be available at any other time requested by GMW.

What does the application fee cover?

Application fees cover the full cost of undertaking a licence assessment in accordance with GMW's obligations under the Water Act 1989. This includes administering the application and one of our diversion inspectors undertaking a full site inspection.

If your application is approved the new expiry date will be recorded in the Victorian Water Register and you will receive a copy of the new licence document.

Are there ongoing costs associated with having a Licence to Operate Works?

Yes, the licence is subject to annual fixed charges issued by GMW in July each year. For details about which charges may apply to your licence, contact the GMW Licensing Team.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on managing a hazardous dam, visit www.gmwater.com.au/hazardousdams or contact our Diversions Team on 1800 013 357.