



Department of
Primary Industries and
Regional Development

Protect
Grow
Innovate

WaterSmart Farms Voucher Program

Round 1 – Wheatbelt groundwater exploration

Program Guidelines

This guideline contains information for applicants and should be read prior to completing the application form

March 2026



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Program Overview

The WaterSmart Farms (WSF) Program was established to improve water security and build resilience in a drying climate, researching fit-for-purpose water supply options suitable for livestock, crop agronomy and agribusiness activities.

The Program incorporates a suite of projects (including WaterSmart Farms, WaterSmart Dams and WaterSmart Industries) that are updating existing or researching new water supply options for Wheatbelt agribusinesses and small communities.

New water supply options include (but are not limited to) desalination, targeting groundwater in the bedrock and locating palaeochannels. Each exploration process is based on geophysical techniques to improve success.

The objective of the WaterSmart Farms Voucher Program (WSF-VP) is to:

- Provide incentives, in the form of vouchers, to support investment in water supply solutions appropriate for a drying climate.
- Expand on-farm research trials and partnerships under WaterSmart Farms.
- Improve landholder understanding of water supply options and confidence in making investment decisions.
- Improve off-grid access to reliable on-farm water supplies.

Round 1 – Wheatbelt groundwater exploration

The purpose of this round is to:

- Provide vouchers for ground based geophysical surveys, and drilling incentives for up to two prospective locations.
- Support science-based investment decisions for locating bores targeting bedrock aquifers.
- Provide property-based prospectivity assessments to identify potential bedrock groundwater drill sites.
- Build the capacity of WA-based suppliers to provide fit for purpose groundwater exploration services in the Wheatbelt.
- Test and refine prospectivity and exploration techniques for bedrock aquifers (developed under WaterSmart Farms), monitor and evaluate exploration success.

How to apply

Application process

Application information will be available via the [DPIRD Grants and Support Web Page](#).

Applicants must submit an online application in SmartyGrants.

If applying for more than one property, separate applications must be submitted.

Key dates

WSF-VP Round 1	Date
Applications open	Sat 7 Mar 2026
Applications close	5pm (AWST) Thurs 30 April 2026

Who should apply?

This round is aimed at primary producers in the eligible area, who are intending to explore bedrock aquifers as a potential (brackish) water source, and considering drilling prior to the end of summer 2026/27.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

- While the project goal is to maximise available yield and improve accessible water quality, neither can be guaranteed.
- Exploration aims for targets with potential yields up to 1L/s.
- Water **quality cannot be guaranteed** and may require further treatment.

Eligibility criteria

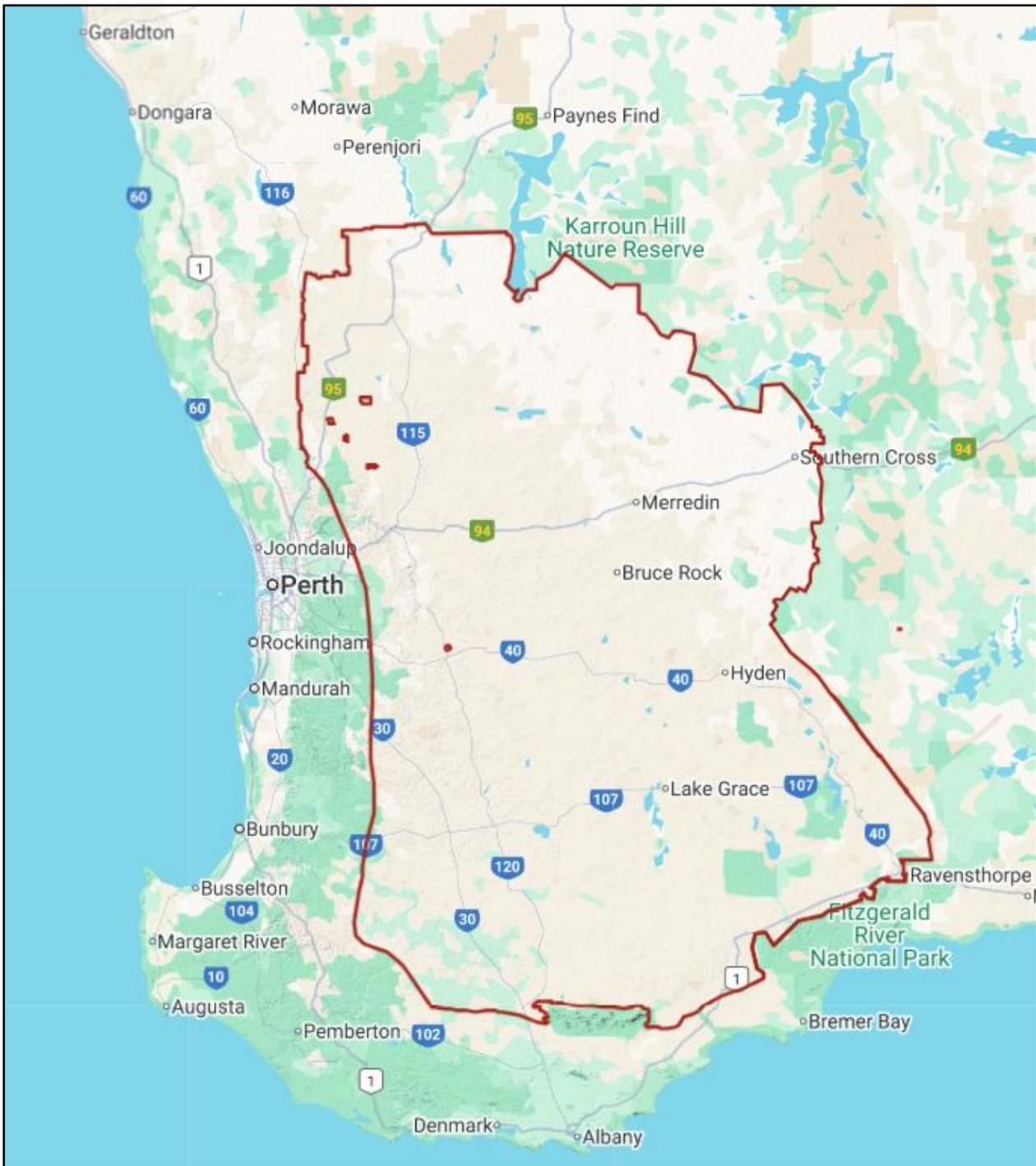
Applicants must meet the following criteria to be considered for this round.

Applicant

- Is the Landowner (or has legal rights to access, explore and drill on the land).
- Has an intent to drill before May 2027.

Property/Business

- Business Type must be a Primary Producer or a Local Government Authority.
- Must be located within the eligible area, as defined by Map 1.



Map 1. WSF-VP. Round 1 – Wheatbelt groundwater exploration Eligibility Area.

Link to digital version:

[Map 1. WSF-VP Round1 - Wheatbelt groundwater exploration eligibility area.](#)

What's on offer?

Successful applicants will receive:

- Voucher for up to \$10,000 (ex GST) for eligible Geophysical Surveys.
- Voucher conditions documents which will include work specifications and supplier guide.
- A targeted area prospectivity map (using methodology developed by WaterSmart Farms for targeting bedrock aquifers), identifying areas of the property that are eligible for voucher use.

If Geophysical Surveys indicate suitable prospectivity, applicants will also receive:

- Up to 2 x ranked prospective drill locations identified (coordinates) and positioned/pegged (eg. marker in paddock) ready for drilling.
- Drilling instruction notes, including 'target zone' and critical 'stop drilling' decision points, such as final depth.

Successful applicants who drill at sites verified by DPIRD, prior to May 2027 will also be eligible to receive:

- A drill incentive voucher for \$5,000 (ex GST) for drilling at prospective location 1.

Should location 1 be unsuccessful and an alternative prospective site is identified, applicants may also receive:

- A second (and final) voucher for \$5,000 (ex GST) for drilling in prospective location 2.

The maximum cash value of vouchers that can be issued via a successful application is \$20,000 (ex GST).

What's expected of applicants?

Eligible applicants will work with WSF Team during the assessment process to provide additional information and facilitate a site visit for further technical assessment if required.

Successful applicants will be expected to:

- Obtain quotes and engage a verified supplier to undertake geophysical surveys. Surveys will be by verified suppliers, at agreed locations, and using survey methods, which will be specified on the voucher.
- Pay the supplier directly for any costs ineligible for funding from this program, supplementary surveys or costs above the voucher value.

If high prospectivity drill site locations are identified, recipients will be expected to:

- Drill at least one hard rock exploration bore at an identified site.
- Notify and liaise with the WSF Team of proposed drilling contractor and timeframes.
- Provide the drilling contractor with the Drill Instruction Notes (that will be provided as part of the WSF-VP process)
- Obtain a drill log from driller at completion of drilling and provide a copy to the DPIRD WSF Team.
- Notify and liaise with DPIRD for sampling and monitoring during and after drilling.

Application Acknowledgments

Applicants will be required to confirm the following statements.

Geophysical surveys acknowledgement

Submitting an application is an acknowledgement that:

- the geophysical targeting work is part of ongoing research and involves shared risk
- geophysical vouchers will enable consultants to identify prospective fractures, from which drill targets can be selected, and if suitable, drilled
- water at targets may be brackish and depending on use, require treatment
- while the project goal is to maximise available yield and improve accessible water quality, neither can be guaranteed

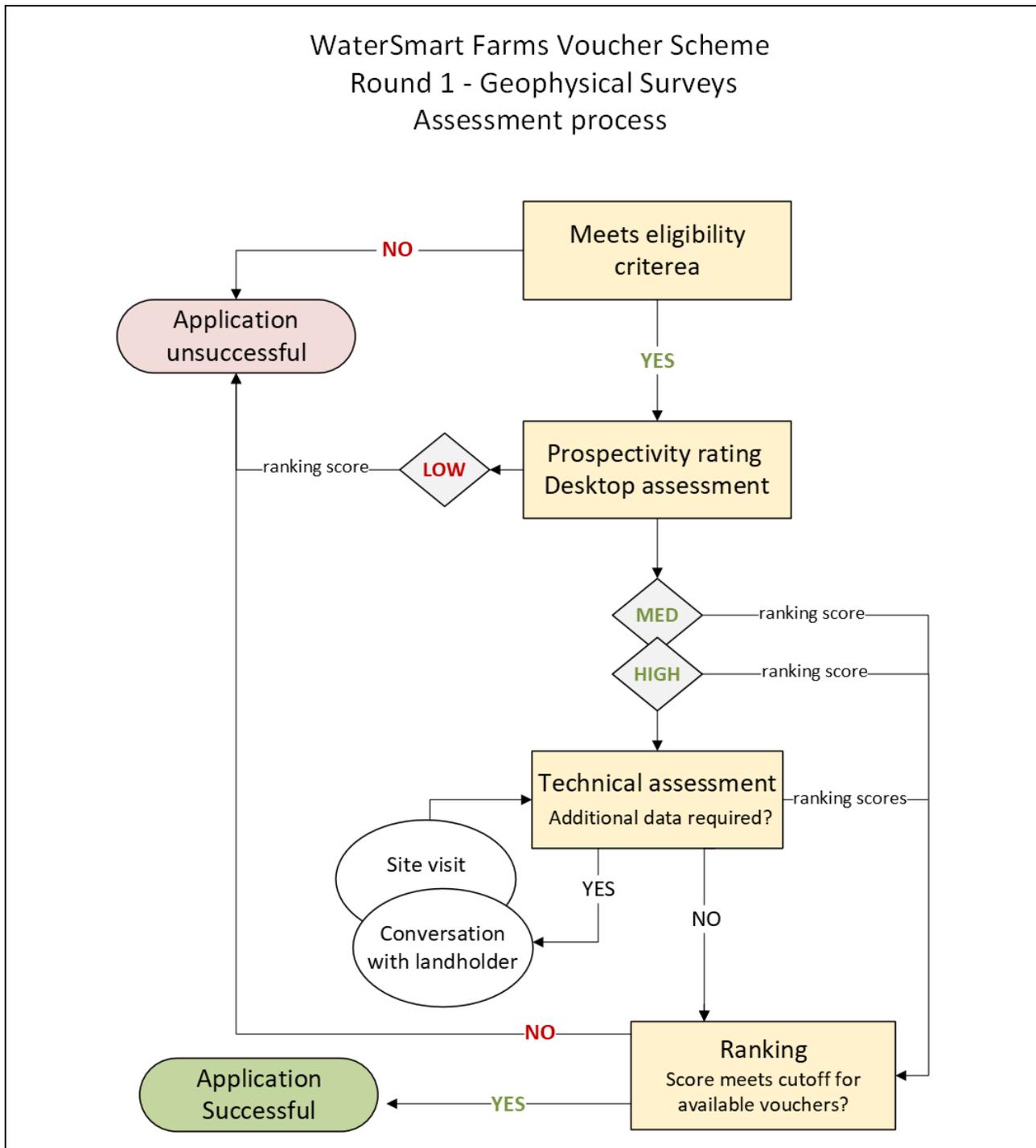
Exploration drilling acknowledgement

Accepting a geophysical survey voucher is an acknowledgement that you:

- intend to drill at least one bore, at your own expense, in a location identified by this process
- understand that there is an inherent risk of drilling low yielding wells
- understand the cost involved with hard rock drilling to a potential depth of 100m
- understand that drill incentive vouchers (of up to \$5K) will only be issued for sites approved by the WSF team, where geophysical surveys indicate suitable prospectivity and for works completed prior to May 2027
- will work collaboratively with DPIRD and agree to information sharing, and
- help arrange access for site surveys, assessment and monitoring.

Assessment Process

The assessment process will be carried out in the following manner:



DPIRD will prioritise applications with a 'high' hydrogeological assessment rating.

Desktop Assessment

The desktop assessment will be aimed at identifying sites with geological features indicative of finding:

- Open fractures within about 100m depth.
- Target volumes of water in the order of 1L/s.
- Geologic structures (such as intersecting faults, dykes and similar) shown as most successful in previous WaterSmart Farms trials.
- Site accessibility (for geophysics surveys and drill equipment).

Assessors will review relevant information including (but not limited to):

- Geological features such as depth to bedrock, dykes and intersecting faults,
- Landform features such as slope, soils and waterways.
- Protected areas, aboriginal cultural heritage and threatened species.
- Agricultural industry water demand mapping.
- Estimated Value and Benefit to your business and farm
- Catchment, landscape and water management impacts.

Results will be rated as **High, Medium** or **Low**

Sites of low geological potential for fractured rock will be unsuccessful and will not proceed to technical assessment phase.

Technical assessment

Technical assessment and data analysis will further refine the desktop assessments and rank properties on prospectivity potential.

Prospectivity potential rankings will be based on expert technical assessment to determine the potential for locating a fractured rock aquifer and the likelihood of areas containing a fractured rock aquifer in bedrock within a 100m depth.

Clarifying information that the technical experts require may be sought through discussions with landholders, and/or site visits, including (but not limited to):

- geological structures
- elevation and landscape position
- soils and geology
- hydrogeology, including current bores, and past drilling results.

Should the Program be oversubscribed, applications with higher rankings will be prioritised.

Notification of application outcomes

Application assessment and notification times are dependent on the number of applications received. Applicants will be notified of the assessment outcome by email.

Recipients and their nominated Service Provider(s) will be notified with the funding amount, required actions, terms and conditions of use.

There is no appeal process.

Vouchers explained

Vouchers fund a specified amount of the total cost of the services which is paid directly to the Service Providers by DPIRD upon completion and acceptance of the work.

Recipients cover the cost of any additional or ineligible expenditure associated with the approved activity.

Activities that can be funded

Geophysical survey vouchers will only be valid for a survey to be undertaken:

- By a supplier listed, or assessed by DPIRD as meeting the criteria specified, on the voucher.
- At a location determined in consultation with, and agreed to, by DPIRD.
- Using the geophysical exploration methodology specified.
- Charges directly related to geophysical survey and assessment.

Drill incentive vouchers will only be valid for drilling:

- Using the drilling instruction notes specified.
- At target locations identified as prospective.

Activities that can not be funded

Vouchers cannot be used for:

- Any supplier or activity not specified on the issued voucher.
- Activities performed prior to the issue date, or after the expiry date, of the voucher.

Payment arrangements

DPIRD will pay the professional service provider when it has received the following:

- A detailed, itemised tax invoice (addressed to DPIRD) for services as described on the voucher, and
- All reports, data, or other information specified on the voucher, and confirmed satisfactory by the WSF team.

The recipient will pay the supplier directly for any costs above the voucher value, ineligible costs or supplementary surveys.

Example A:

Dave's application for a geophysical survey is successful. An approved geophysical survey provider has quoted \$15,000 (ex GST).

DPIRD issues a voucher for \$10,000 (ex GST)

On completion of the work the geophysical service provider will issue 2 invoices:

\$10,000 (ex GST) to DPIRD, and
\$ 5,000 (ex GST) to the recipient.

Survey results locate 2 prospective drill target sites. Dave obtains a quote from a driller for \$25,000 (ex GST). Dave decides to go ahead with drilling and meets the criteria to apply for a drill incentive voucher.

For approved works completed prior to the specified date of May 2027, the drill service provider will issue 2 invoices:

\$ 5,000 (ex GST) to DPIRD, and
\$20,000 (ex GST) to the recipient.

Where applicable, GST will be paid in addition to the voucher value.

Example B:

The total cost of service is \$16,500(GST inc). The voucher value is \$10,000 (ex GST). The service provider will issue 2 invoices:

\$11,000 (\$10,000 + GST) to DPIRD for the voucher value, and
\$ 5,500 (\$ 5,000 + GST) to the recipient.

Administration

Conflict of interest

Assessment team members will not participate in the assessment of applications where there is a perceived conflict of interest. The assessment team chair will be responsible for making judgements regarding conflicts of interest.

Water Licencing Regulations

Under some circumstances landholders need to comply with legal obligations regarding water licencing regulations. The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER), in accordance with the *Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914 (RiWI Act)*, issues water licences and permits to construct or alter a bore (well) or take groundwater.

For more information

- [Water Licencing](#)
- [Do I need a water licence or permit?](#)

Aboriginal heritage compliance

Laws are in place in Western Australia to protect and manage Aboriginal heritage. This could include rock art, ancient caves or burial sites, waterways, ceremonial sites or scar trees. Landholders must:

- Ensure you comply with all legal obligations regarding the *Aboriginal Heritage Act (WA) 1972* and
- Where required provide evidence that you have conducted due diligence specific to Aboriginal heritage before undertaking any activities on land, sea or country.
- For more information
 - [Home - ACHknowledge Portal](#)
 - [Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Inquiry System](#)

Personal Information and disclosure of information

Applicants are informed that DPIRD is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1992 (WA)*, which provides a general right of access to records held by the State Government agencies and local governments.

DPIRD may publish the recipients on its website, in media statements and in its materials.

Contact Information

For further information on the Program please contact:

DPIRD Water Science Team
email: water.science@dpird.wa.gov.au

Glossary of Terms

Applicant - the entity/individual who makes the application for funding.

Application - an application (or relevant part of an application) made to the State of Western Australia for funding under the Fund

AWST - Australian Western Standard Time

Bedrock Aquifer – broken and fractured bedrock that contains useable supplies of groundwater.

DPIRD - Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Fractured Rock - fractures within a bedrock aquifer, such as granite or dolerite, that can store and transmit water.

Grant – WaterSmart Farms Voucher Program

Guidelines – are the guidelines for the Program, this document

Key Contact – the applicant person to contact if there are any queries or information required in relation to the Program

Primary Producer – An individual, trust, or company carrying on a primary production business in plant or animal cultivation or on-farm processing.

Prospectivity Assessment – a property based review of available data to determine the potential for locating a fractured rock aquifer. Prospectivity will be assessed primarily on geology, but may also consider infrastructure factors if it does not compromise geo-siting principals.

Prospectivity – the likelihood of locating an accessible fractured rock aquifer, using methodology developed by WaterSmart Farms, for targeting fractured rock aquifers.

SmartyGrants – is the online grant management software tool used by DPIRD.

Targeted Area Prospectivity Map – a map highlighting the areas on a property that have been determined to have a level of prospectivity sufficient to proceed to ground based geophysical surveys.

Verified supplier – confirmed by DPIRD as demonstrating an ability to fulfill the specified contract by meeting a minimum level criteria assessment and to qualify as a DPIRD supplier.

WSF – The WaterSmart Farms Program is a suite of collaborative projects researching fit-for-purpose water supply options suitable for livestock, crop agronomy and agribusiness activities.

WSF Team - The Team is led by DPIRD, but may include experts and researchers from other organisations.

Important Disclaimer

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