

Report on a page

This audit examined how the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water (the department) collects and uses information from owners to manage risks to dam safety. Figure A shows how we expected the department to use information to manage risks.

Figure A
Key elements of managing regulatory information and risk



Source: Queensland Audit Office.

We concluded that the department is not effectively managing the information it collects or targeting risks to non-compliance. We recommend the department collects and stores information on the level of non-compliance accurately and then acts on non-compliance, using the full range of enforcement measures at the department’s disposal to address serious or persistent non-compliance.

Collecting information

The department has approved processes for collecting the information for the legislated safety requirements. However, it is not effectively collecting information on its dam safety upgrade schedule. The schedule (set in 2005) gave owners targets to upgrade dam spillways based on their capacity to safely release floodwaters. The department is not effectively monitoring progress to ensure all the upgrades will be completed by the upcoming 2025 and/or 2035 deadlines. Eight spillways must be upgraded by 2025 and 30 by 2035, with total costs estimated at \$3.1 billion.

The department’s dam monitoring system does not effectively monitor compliance with all its safety requirements. It uses spreadsheets to monitor compliance but the individual spreadsheets are not up to date, complete or accurate. This makes it difficult for the department to track whether dam owners are conducting and providing key reports on dam safety inspections on time. We found examples of inspection reports being significantly overdue (see Appendix C).

Managing risks

The department has developed a risk prioritisation process, based on the eight risk factors recommended by the 2012 Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry, to inform half its dam site visits. It also considers additional factors for the other half, that are not risk-based or well-documented, such as availability of resources, workload and budget constraints relating to travel.

Acting on non-compliance

The department has worked on developing good relationships with dam owners as part of its strategy to promote voluntary compliance. It runs workshops and training for owners and the community to increase understanding of dam safety principles and compliance requirements. The department relies almost exclusively on encouraging voluntary compliance to dam safety conditions and is reluctant to use the full range of enforcement options available. It is not ensuring all owners comply quickly enough with all the legislated reporting requirements when it identifies non-compliance with dam safety conditions.

