



## Summary of key points from the *Outcome of the perception and needs report - evaluation of the Premier's Water Foundation* (April 2007)

An evaluation of the Premier's Water Foundation (PWF) program's operations and effectiveness in the interest of good governance and to consider the future needs of the program was recently completed. It was considered timely to undertake a review of the administration and also to consider the future of the program, following two rounds of funding (totaling \$5.7 million for 13 projects) and the transfer of the management and administration of foundation activities and contracts from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to the Department of Water.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 28 various stakeholders (successful/unsuccessful applicants, foundation board and administration staff, Department of Water managers, research and development (R&D) experts from other state agencies, research bodies and committees involved in water research).

The purpose of the program evaluation was to:

- identify the need for the existing PWF and its justification
- determine the need for a state grant scheme that fosters R&D in water
- to conduct an environmental scan to identify changes in the landscape that may affect the need.

While there is a perception that \$3million per funding round is insufficient to meet the need, most interviewees felt the contribution of the foundation to water research and development has been valuable and is recognised as a unique locally-based research fund provider. Its existence assists in ensuring the state retains a focus on water issues and there is a perception that the foundation has altered the state of play by successfully bringing together elements of a fragmented research and development sector.

The perception and needs report demonstrates the need for change in three primary areas:

- increase the amount of funding and have separate funding schemes targeting the needs of different groups and priority areas

- adopt a new governance structure to improve stakeholder confidence in relation to decision making
- improve communication with stakeholders.

The key points of the report are briefly summarised below.

- Both stakeholder feedback and the current water management environment demonstrate a continuing need for a funding body that exclusively promotes and supports local water initiatives. “The PWF is unique in that it is considered to be the only funding body focused exclusively on local issues.”
- It was reported, “the PWF’s key strengths are the fact that it is locally based and that it has strong support from the academic and industry sectors.”
- “Water and its management are top of mind in the community; there is a perceived need to develop new sources of water and foster R&D in water management. If anything, the perception of need has increased in the time since the PWF was first established.”
- “Discussions with the Board (of the PWF) and the Water Corporation confirmed the requirement for additional investment into research, development and education in water in Western Australia.”
- The existing funding amount (\$3 million per round) was considered insufficient and the lack of ongoing/long term funding as a threat to the scheme. The past funding frequency (16 months between Round 1 and Round 2) was perceived as adequate.
- The scheme could improve its effectiveness. “The existing PWF (research and development) fund should be one of a series of tools to assist water management.”
- Communication related to the application process and outcomes from the foundation is perceived as poor in terms of quality and frequency and there is need to “improve external communication, in particular in relation to board composition, reasons for decisions and progress and outcomes of funded projects.”
- It was suggested that “priorities and target areas need reviewing and there should be more opportunities for smaller, education and innovation projects.”

The outcome of the needs assessment confirmed that water remains a key concern to the community, with the topic increasing in prominence in the political and media arenas over the last year. This interest has been precipitated largely by extensive drought that has gripped most of the country with water supply levels in all major cities falling to critical levels.

There is a stakeholder expectation that the outcomes of projects funded will contribute to the *State Water Plan 2007* and that debate about Western Australia's water future will be continuous and robust.

The need for continued research and development, innovation and education on water availability and resource management in urban Western Australia is increasing with the continued pressure on water supplies generated by the reduction and variability of rainfall and the population growth.

The review of the Premier's Water Foundation has identified the need for a new approach for coordinating and funding of water research in Western Australia. Based on the findings of this evaluation an options paper on future strategic directions has been established for Government's consideration.

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