

CSIRO Land and Water

This document reflects an excellent start on the development of a WA Water Policy Framework. Most issues are covered and there is clear identification of what new directions are being taken. Furthermore the language is concise and accessible and the document is easy to follow. The following comments must be seen in this light.

General Comments.

- The discussion in relation to Build Knowledge and Capacity Through Science and Innovation is naturally strongly supported by CSIRO. We look forward to continuing our partnerships with State Agencies especially in the area of improving our on-line access to and therefore interpretation of the condition of our water resources. We also support the parallel and integrated development of social and economic research to underpin decision making issues associated with high value water, institutional arrangements, and the design of property rights and allocation policies as outlined in the strategy.
- There may have been some merit in deriving some overall principles against which the meeting of objectives could be set. For example, there are potential trade-offs to be made within the triple bottom line concept when trying to meet multiple objectives and some form of touchstone assist in interpreting “better” outcomes in multi-objective decision making would be useful.
- Many definitions of sustainability now include institutional factors both in a structural (regulator vs utility) or non structural way (e.g. the rights and responsibilities of the community). These issues are not comprehensively dealt with. The achievement of adaptive learning for example is presented in a relatively context free manner but this may not occur without appropriate institutions.
- The objective of sustainability is presumed to be largely inclusive of the other objectives. However more precision may be required. Sustainability for many includes current and future generations. It is also difficult to establish whether the framework takes a strong or weaker stance on sustainability even though the three dimensions are mentioned. There are many different perceptions of what it means to maintain our natural environment—what baseline are we assuming and how are we incorporating climate change? Are climate change and other anthropogenic change agents regarded as a natural event or are we going to try to prop up existing ecosystems in their current state?
- The relationship between the overarching framework and the regional plans may need to be described in more detail. The reason for this is that if there is to be an overarching framework it needs to state some long term “dos” and “don’ts” about water resources management if the certainty desired for is to be created. Some of these basic premises will be derived as the details of the water resource and its contributions at a regional level are further understood. The characteristics of the regional plans will also as suggested need to fit in with the state approach. This is all part of adaptive learning but perhaps the

dynamic relationship between both levels of planning could be explored further.

This problem manifests itself a little in the multi-level description of some of the objectives. Quite specific examples are mixed in with quite general statements. This is possibly inevitable at this stage of water planning and implementation in WA—specific examples are required to illustrate general principles. However these examples may date and there may be a need to drive the level of analysis in the document up to the state level more consistently.

- Drainage does not seem to be examined in detail, there are different urban and rural approaches to drainage and attempts at drainage reform have hit difficulties in WA. What principles should apply and can they be universal for the state?
- The issues under “delivery of services to build strong and healthy communities” pertain mostly to traditional levels of service. The issues of regional development which may or may not be fostered by the statewide plan need also to be considered. Some population and community planning can be enhanced or inhibited by some overall decisions. How does water affect the ambitions of regional development authorities? If water is guaranteed for a particular region the social planning can be quite different than if it is possible to move the water to other regions. Water allocation can be an extremely powerful tool in long term community development.

Specific Comments

P15 The second paragraph in “What’s new?” seems to introduce elements not in the framework

P16 Should sustainability assessment (and for that matter water sensitive urban design) be more appropriately placed under the sustainability objective?

P 17 The last paragraph, as written, seems somewhat tangential to the vibrant economy argument. Perhaps the last sentence should lead the argument?

P18 Does speculation add to lessened water security and how does this occur?

P18 Risk Assignment—what does the word “equitably” mean in this case?—also what is meant by “share” in the What’s New? panel.

P20 There is a strong economic and acceptable risk component to the protection of catchments as well as social and recreational concerns. No doubt this will be unpacked as the framework develops but there will need to be overarching guidelines for the state to guide regional plans.