

COMMUNITY WATER FORUM

DRAFT STATE WATER CONSERVATION STRATEGY

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

ALEXANDER LIBRARY, PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA
7 AUGUST 2002



Office of
Water Regulation



Water and Rivers
Commission



CONTEXT

A Community Water Forum covering the Draft State Water Conservation Strategy was held at the Alexander Library in Perth on 6 August 2002.

The objectives of the forum were:

- provide an opportunity for stakeholders to exchange views and ideas and to network with colleagues and associates who have an interest in rural water matters;
- provide delegates with an opportunity to contribute to a statement of key issues relating to rural water; and
- provide delegates with an opportunity to contribute to a summary document of the recommendations for addressing rural water issues to be taken to the Premier's Water Symposium.

During the session participants were asked to ask questions or provide feedback on issues contained within the State Water Conservation Strategy. These issues were recorded during at the time and this document provides a summary of these outcomes.

These notes are a recording of comments that were received during the State Water Conservation Strategy Community Forum. Where responses were made by panel members or other experts, their comments are indicated.

- Air conditioning – How significant a water use is this? Stuart White¹ commented that it is very important and needs attention, especially in bleed valves and cooling towers. He also commented that an idea was put to him to have cooling tower water used to flush toilets and that this could have merit.
- Gardens – crux is changing behaviour rather than a technical fix. Some technological solutions (eg irrigation controllers) can cause inefficient water use if not operated correctly- eg continue operating during rainy periods. Concluded that WA needs programs with both aspects.
- Local Government involvement is very important. State Government should forge a strong relationship with local government, as they are most capable of achieving the long lasting behavioural change to lead to water efficiency.
- Officer Basin – Potential uses could include: Murrin Murrin mine, Kalgoorlie (600km away), selling water to South Australia. Don McFarlane² noted that the water was brackish (requires treatment for drinking), and considerable distances from areas where it could be used.
- Water sensitive design should be required. Developers must understand that the public want water sensitive entry statements.
- Water Corporation has spent \$540m on source development, and \$3m on demand management. Questioned what savings on Water Corporation expenditure could be made by spending more money on demand management? It was noted that the \$3m expenditure is an increase from \$1m normally budgeted by Water Corporation.
- Could there be a subsidy to remove lawns and gardens? Using more paving would reduce water demand. Don McFarlane commented that this would be an expensive option. Stuart White¹ suggested that that planting low water use native plants is a more aesthetic option.
- There has been a 20% decrease in rainfall – has this been factored into Water Corporation costings. Lloyd Weber³ responded that water supply cost is based on lower rainfall and yield (since 1975).
- Carbon Taxes will increase energy costs. Pumping costs are based on current energy cost, and therefore would increase with the carbon tax. Water Corporation representative responded that capital cost (not energy cost) is the major cost of supplying water.



- Questioned the Strategy's recommendation to change metering to seasonal billing. Would this mean increasing the number of readings each year, as meters are currently read twice a year. Would these costs be internalised by the water service providers?
- Protection of confined aquifers is very important.
- Questioned the logic of water pricing where scheme water is not used (especially in regional areas). Eg. Gingin where there is no charge on water used for irrigation. Where scheme water is supplied, there is a cost on delivery, but this is subsidised. However there is no charge for catchment / resource management in WA. A natural resource management charge should be developed.
- There are benefits of desalination (Esperance to Kalgoorlie), which would make 15GL/yr available for Perth. Who bears costs of such changes? If the costs are passed onto small business, they are not going to be effective. Competition is required for Water Corporation if the true benefits of deregulation are to be realised.
- Is User - Pays appropriate, as it will place a greater burden on business and regional areas. Will Community Service Obligations (CSOs) still be considered? Cross subsidies are needed for regional life to be possible. Don McFarlane² commented that this is social-political decision and that CSO were accepted through the Coalition of Australian Government reforms.
- Total costs, including environmental costs, should be built into water prices. Prices should include a volumetric cost (80c/kL). The current price is not real, as it does not reflect all costs. Believes that there will be no change to price for water users as the Government will not be able to resist the pressure not to change prices. Community knowledge, especially of price structure is important if we are to avoid succumbing to the pressure not to change anything. Ground water so cheap that there is no incentive for waste water reuse/efficiency. We need natural resource management charges.
- Water reuse. 350 million kL waste water is disposed to the ocean every day. Shouldn't we do something useful with it? How do we stop disposing water after one use? Simon Toze⁴ comments: There are important social aspects (people want water to be reused, but often not in their own area). A maximum target of 20-30% is possible for non potable reuse. There are significant costs to treat water and then return to houses for non potable use. Country towns commonly use treated wastewater to irrigate recreation areas, but this is not yet common in Perth.

- Land clearing is decreasing rainfall – (urban and agricultural landclearing). For example, there are differences in rainfall along rabbit proof fence (more rain on vegetated side of fence). Don McFarlane² comments: Knowledge in this area is increasing, although it is still poorly understood. CSIRO explanation is that this is not likely to be vegetation, as our rainfall is mainly generated by frontal storms. However, they do not have an explanation for why this occurs. He noted that Israel is planting trees in an effort to increase rainfall.
- Grey water reuse (in house). Reticulation not allowed 1.5m from boundary fence. Draft guidelines (for wastewater reuse) were recently released. Brian Devine⁵ commented that Health Department is considering relaxing restrictions on grey water use in domestic situation. Grey water is used in many situations in rural areas.
- Need to look at the effects of waste water reuse on environment.
- How feasible are rainwater tanks for collecting drinking water. A considerable quantity of water can be harvested from the roof. Stuart White commented that in many areas, harvesting rainfall could supplement household supplies. A clean roof and tank are important. The rainwater tank must not allow water to flow back into the scheme system (a back flow preventer is necessary). Ed Hauck⁶ commented that collecting rainfall in tanks would reduce on recharge to aquifers.
- How will pricing be implemented? How will it be scaled? Cost reflective Pricing? Reflecting water use? Need to protect low income earners.
- Officer Basin – the “sunk cost” to get water from Southern Cross to Kalgoorlie is \$1.60/kL and hence any alternative supply would need to be lower cost; probably is not possible.
- Conservation message – not clear how impediments to conservation are to be overcome, what are the externalities and why are practices not done now eg low flow showers. For example, people are prepared to pay for big 4 wheel drives. They don't always go for sensible low cost options like Chinese shoes and cars but still buy Italian and Porsche. The strategy will therefore only affect a portion of the community prepared to take on conservation for altruism or dollar saving and never reach all community. (received by email after the forum)
- Front loading washing machines can save 25,000 litres per year when compared to top loaders.
- Water use efficiency also causes reductions in greenhouse emissions (through reduced water heating requirements). The reduction in energy use can be greater than reductions in water use.



- Creating a water use efficiency industry would have employment benefits (advisers and installers).
 - The USA has water efficiency regulations for manufacturing showerheads. We need to have interstate agreement for this in Australia.
 - Utilisation/total water use will double in about 20 years. However population not growing at this same rate. We need to control our population to achieve demand management.
1. Simon Toze is the Director of the Institute for Sustainable Futures, Sydney University of Technology.
 2. Don McFarlane is the Director of the Resource Management Division, Water and Rivers Commission.
 3. Lloyd Weber is an economist with the Water Corporation.
 4. Simon Toze is a Senior Research Scientist with CSIRO Land and Water.
 5. Brian Devine is the Acting Director Environmental Health, Department of Health.
 6. Ed Hauck is Manager of the Hydrology and Water Resources Branch, Water and Rivers Commission.