

**STATE WATER FORUM
CITY WEST FUNCTION CENTRE
28 MARCH 2007**

David Hatt convened the Forum at 9.42am. Forum members were welcomed and David summarised the progress on water reform to date.

Barbara Wiese and Geoff Syme of the SW Sustainability Panel presented on their findings and broader implications of sustainability assessment in Government decision-making.

Q. Chris Scott – WA Fruit Growers Association

Statement that people do not understand what's going on with regards to SW Yarragadee. The EPA report states that no new licences are being given. The community is not trusting of Government and needs to be kept informed.

Questioned why land was being purchased for a bore for Manjiump, Bridgetown, Boyanup Brook by the Water Corporation.

A. Geoff Syme - CSIRO

Agreed that community involvement was essential in moving water reform forward. There is an opportunity in the SW Yarragadee proposal to apply Bob Gibson's sustainability principles seriously and learn through an adaptive management approach.

A. Jim Gill – Water Corporation (answered after morning tea break)

Yes, the Water Corporation had purchased land for an exploratory bore at Nannup. This was to service the seven schemes in the area (including Bridgetown and Hester) as announced by the Minister for Water Resources in November 2006. These towns have an infrequent rain weather pattern and a water quality problem and require a more reliable source of water. The \$120 million plan to augment these schemes includes other measures including raising a dam wall.

Q. David Wren – Pastoralists and Graziers Association

The proposal to take water from the SW Yarragadee has been developed over a long time and information has changed. Recharge was originally estimated to be 350gl pa and now it is 150 gl pa and the EPA have put a 120 gl cap on extractions. The Water Corporation proposal has been given priority by the EPA, yet competition is happening now. Processing of other applications has been stopped.

A. Barbara Wiese – SW Sustainability Panel

The 120gl limit was proposed by the EPA and this issue greatly concerned the Panel. The Panel sought expert advice and believe that there is sufficient water to meet Water Corporation and reasonable regional needs into the future. The Panel have recommended that processes be put in place to address the current competition for water. The rules should be in place prior to the assessment. People deserve to be treated fairly.

Q. David Wren – Pastoralists and Graziers Association

Statement that there was competition for water from the Water Corporation, private sector and mining. High security is needed.

David Hatt advised that the Department of Water would address David on his specific concern.

Q. Steven McKiernan - Conservation Council

The Panel report noted that Government departments can operate in silos. What recommendations did the Panel make with regard to changing the (environmental) assessment process?

A. Barbara Wiese – SW Sustainability Panel

Panel has not made specific recommendations. There is an opportunity to learn from this process, the one ongoing for the Fremantle Outer Harbour and the Gorgon Project. Agencies should collaborate to develop new ways forward.

Q. Doug Hall – Irrigation Association of Australia

Complemented the Panel on their report. With respect to the Independent Specialist Review Group was there consideration of implementation and adaptive management specialists?

A. Geoff Syme – CSIRO

Traditionally, water resources have been seen as a hydrogeological problem rather than the broader context of social, environmental and economic interests. Agreed that expert panel should include Government, industry and community experts. Risk of leaving questions to the end of who should use, if you only look at what is available in early stages.

Morning tea.

*A presentation was made by **Helen Forte** Department of the Premier and Cabinet on the State Water Plan. **Paul Frewer** and **Elizabeth Burns** of the Department of Water presented on the implementation of the State Water Plan, Water Reform and NWI and the development of new water legislation.*

Q. Jim Turley – Vegetable Growers Association

(To Paul Frewer). Regional areas have been consulted on policy and principles. Very little on the detail and this is disappointing. Would like Department of Water to commit to engagement on the detail in regional areas.

(To Geoff Syme). WA is chasing after the NWI without understanding the impacts. Any insight on what is happening in other parts of Australia.

David Hatt advised that WA had delayed signing the NWI. There was considerable push from SW growers further to a visit from a Federal representative for the State to sign which occurred in April 2006.

A. Paul Frewer – Department of Water

Reiterated that the reforms need to be treated as a package. Assume that the issue referred to is licence fees. There is no charge for basic rights to water for stock and domestic. Water is a common property resource however. Fisheries pay licence fees as do forestry for these resources. Air quality is monitored and controlled. Water is now catching up. Happy to meet or be invited to meetings to discuss further.

A. Geoff Syme – CSIRO

Recalled a meeting at Parliament House in 2006 to discuss progress on the NWI. The environmental and economic aspects are progressing reasonably well but the planning and social aspects are less well developed. You need a top down approach for consistency and a regional and bottom up approach to address local variations and conditions.

Q. Steve Dilley – WA Farmers Federation

Disagreed with previous question and thought that public consultation to date was reasonable. Concern is over the push to draft the legislation. Not enough time by April 11 to review and respond, especially for country people.

Also concerned with the use of water in farm dams. Are dams used for aquaculture going to attract licence fees or metering fees? Are dams used for non-intensive livestock watering going to attract licence fees or metering? Need a meeting on dam licensing.

A. Paul Frewer – Department of Water

The legislation is enabling in nature. There is a tight time frame to complete the consultative process and much consultation is already completed. There will be additional workshops on specific issues.

A. Rob Hammond – Department of Water

In relation to the question concerning dams used for livestock and aquaculture, the answer is 'no' and 'no'.¹

Q. Jessica Shaw – Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Concerned with flaws in consultation process on water services legislation. Heard about it after it closed. CCI / CME and KIC all left out. Is there going to be any opportunity for more private sector involvement especially with bulk water supply? The comment on the inclusion of private sector participation in the State Water Plan is welcomed. Earlier consultation was broad, but really interested in the detail. Is there any opportunity for water market reform? This does not seem to be addressed in the Department of Water's legislative proposal.

David Hatt advised that senior levels in Treasury are addressing this issue of market reform and acknowledged that it is an important issue.

A. Paul Frewer – Department of Water

The timeframe for the water services paper results from the requirements of the Minister for Water Resources and Government to progress this legislation. Third party access is not precluded in what has been drafted to date. The intention is to keep options open. Important to not codify solutions while the market is evolving.

Happy to brief and talk/ meet with interested groups. Cabinet has signed off on the policy direction and the Department's role is to put the mechanisms and processes in place.

Q. Stephen Carroll – Australian Bankers Association

Happy with the detail in the Government's Response on water entitlements. Do they apply to Irrigation Cooperatives that account for two thirds of all water use in sector.

¹ Subsequent to the meeting further clarification was provided by the Department of Water: Dams used for aquaculture purposes or watering livestock in non-intensive situations generally do not require a water licence or metering and will not be charged fees. There may be some exceptions to this arrangement in parts of the state where very close management of water resources is needed to reduce impact on water entitlement holders. This will be reflected through the localised statutory water management planning process and may require these dams to be licensed, metering and fees paid accordingly.

A. Paul Frewer – Department of Water

Yes, they will be held at Cooperative level. Equitable entitlement to water at member level.

Geoff Calder – Harvey Water

Added that this arrangement was supported. The existing arrangement worked well as evidenced by 18 mortgages being held against cooperative members' entitlements in their Cooperative alone.

David Hatt thanked the Forum for their continued attendance, interest and time. The Forum concluded at 12.10pm with a light luncheon.