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The social values and impact study for the South West Yarragadee aimed to:

- identify the social values associated with the water resources of the Blackwood Groundwater Area and their importance;
- assess how these values may be affected by human use of the water, both in situ and if withdrawn, including withdrawal and export from the region and;
- examine the attitudes people have towards the proposal, and circumstances in which attitudes may change.

This was achieved through two surveys: telephone survey with 414 South West community members and a short complementary telephone interview with 316 Perth residents. The study reflects social values and the levels of understanding within the study sample at the time the survey was conducted (May 2003).

#### South West Survey

Surveys of South West community members showed they considered groundwater use for the natural environment as being of the greatest importance, followed by regional household use. Future use in the region was also important as was use for irrigation. Household use outside the region was clearly considered to be of least importance. It was also shown that the South West community held strong intrinsic values for both the environment generally and groundwater specifically. That is, there was widespread value in the environment and groundwater just "being there".

Measures to examine attitudes to fairness in water allocation decisions showed there was strong agreement throughout the community on the need for everyone to have a say in water allocation; the need for long term, sustainable management over short term gains and the requirement for efficient water use. These measures also found that two distinct groups existed in the community who viewed fairness differently. The groups were described as *Regional Development* and *Wider Use*, the former group emphasising the allocation of water primarily for the development of the region and its economy, while the other group was more inclined to place importance on a wider use of water to environmental needs and uses outside the region.

There was strong disagreement with the water export proposal by the South West community. Only 12per cent directly agreed with it, with 8per cent being unsure. People's decisions were then challenged through consideration of a variety of outcomes or consequences of their decisions. Aspects of (un)certainly about the future had the greatest potential to change people's minds. That is, those in favour would change their minds given uncertainty about the provision for the region's future needs (including the environment). Those originally opposed to the proposal were more inclined to change their minds if future certainty could be guaranteed. However, even given these challenges, the community still remained opposed to the proposal. There was no difference between the two fairness groups in their trade-off decisions. This means that both groups, who judge fairness in two different ways, considered the groundwater export proposal to be less than fair, even though one of the groups was more likely to consider wider use outside the region.

Attitudinal measurements showed the community had little trust and certainty in the ability of the experts and authorities to conduct investigations and make appropriate decisions for the future of the region.

The results of analyses to ascertain the major variables that predicted respondents' decisions about the groundwater export proposal showed *trust and certainty* to be the major predictor along with *intrinsic groundwater values*. That is, if people were confident that the authorities and experts could ensure that the future needs of the region would be met, and the groundwater would be managed sustainably, they might be more inclined to support the proposal.

### Perth Survey

The findings of this short survey were consistent with those of the South West survey. Perth respondents considered the export of Blackwood groundwater for Perth use to be less than fair to the people of the South West and to be a least favoured source, along with storing wastewater in aquifers for future use. Reuse options and desalination were the most favoured sources of the seven offered for consideration.

When support for the proposal was examined in the same way as for the South West survey, less than a third of the Perth sample absolutely agreed with the water export proposal and less than half the total sample supported the proposal even given the possibility of total sprinkler bans (43per cent of the total sample) or increased water prices (47per cent). Support for the proposal markedly increased to almost two-thirds of the total sample if the future needs of the South West could be guaranteed. On the other hand, a majority of those who originally supported the proposal, reversed this support if the ability to meet future South West needs was in doubt, or if it could be shown that Perth people were wasting water. This decision pattern was the same as for the South West community.

The conclusions of the report outline the consistencies between the two surveys and the unequivocal message. Perth respondents have more preferred sources of water and are not in favour of importing groundwater from the South West Yarragadee. The South West respondents have strong environmental values, favour regional uses and are highly concerned about the future of the region and have little confidence and trust in the ability of the experts to make considered decisions for the future.