

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND SECURING AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF DRINKING WATER

WORKSHOP SUMMARY AND OUTCOMES

It was a good and positive meeting with plenty of participant contribution and input

The four technical experts gave a brief overview from their perspective and addressed the four issues

There was a great deal of consensus to the point where participants asked, “Why can’t the relationships, negotiations and discussions always be like this?”

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

- Need to appreciate that regulation is not always a dirty word – government agencies do much more than regulate, they have a lot of technical expertise, assistance and advice to offer
- Have to be much more innovative in finding solutions – think laterally
- Need to share information – there are a lot of good ideas out there but few opportunities to share and celebrate
- Councils and water authorities are good at getting data on water use (lawn evaporation, size of shower heads, sewerage loads, etc) but not so good at getting data on natural systems to integrate with their planning
- Community perception that licensing arrangements favour environmental flows
- Regulation needs to be more flexible/adaptable across the state to reflect different climates, natural systems, demands, communities, etc – one size does not fit all!
- Government agencies are keen to assist
- Water has a value
- There is a conundrum and tension over continuing demands for water for new houses and new developments, and increasing demands for environmental flows
- Everyone wants to talk commonsense but agencies, communities and councils all have a different definition – need a shared view
- There is an over allocation of water from unregulated rivers
- Climate change is a big issues
- There is pressure to address climate change and environmental flows but do we know for how and within what time frame. For example, our understanding of what is required now over say 10 years may turn out in reality to be entirely wrong

- There is too much focus on the environmental outcomes, and not enough on the social and economic outcomes – need to find a better balance
- What is an environmental flow – do we have shared view in Local Government
- Water re-use is not well understood or appreciated - public debate is often dominated by Sydney issues and emotional language.
- Shortage of skilled people to plan, manage and run water businesses

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS REQUIRED?

- Need long-term business planning, including water loss management plans and marketing plans
- Need effective management principles that address social, environmental and economic issues
- Need rigorous IWCM plans
- Require good plans that include risk management
- Need appropriate time to plan and implement
- Need adequate resources
- Need to link business planning with land-use and natural resource management planning – catchment management authorities can be useful here and can help build bridges between Local Government and catchment management authorities
- Community awareness and ownership need to be considered
- Need to find balance between providing water as a community service (community/Local Government view) and government pressure for water services to become businesses
- Must bring the community along in all discussions/debates right from the start
- Education is vital, not just focussing on schools (where students are sometimes leaders) but also not forgetting older more conservative community members who can find change confusing and upsetting
- Need tools and strategies to engage the community
- Must build political will
- Key element is about managing change especially in communities where people have taken water services for granted over many years

- Need environmental impact statements (EIS)

WHAT MIGHT LGSA AND WATER DIRECTORATE DO?

- Convene a state forum on all issues related to water re-use, including addressing community attitudes
- Develop a shared vision amongst Local Government and council-owned utilities on what an environmental flow is
- Look more closely at climate change and its likely implications
- Help councils and water authorities identify and find resources to implement IWCM programs
- Help to find appropriately skilled people to manage and run water businesses – but ensure a balance of engineering and ecological expertise
- Develop tools and strategies to help manage change
- Look at how industry might help