

**WATER MANAGERS FORUM
IPWEA NSW DIVISION ANNUAL CONFERENCE
TUESDAY 24 MAY 2005**

Gary Mitchell introduced the Water Managers Forum as an initiative of the Water Directorate. The structure of the Forum is based on the successful model of Water Managers Forums at the two previous LGSA Water Management Conferences.

Will Strachan of the Department of Commerce facilitated the Forum. Panellists included John Anderson (JA), Piers Toop (PT), Daryl McGregor (DM) and Stewart McLeod (SM).

Audience participation was invited and all of the proceedings are recorded below.

Comments on climate change included:

- Data and records are not available to be definitive on climate change in Australia as the record sets only go back to approx 1820s. (JA)
- Current drought may be a 1:150 year occurrence. (JA)
- Need to be able to manage years of lower rainfall like generations in first half of 20th century with more robust water systems and less personal use of water. (JA)
- 10 per cent reduction in rainfall can translate to a 20-25 per cent reduction in stream flows. (JA)
- Data records from Albury going back to the 1840s suggest the following (DM):
 - 1840-1890s high rainfall patterns coinciding with establishment of agricultural patterns
 - 1890-1940s low rainfall patterns coinciding with drought and depression
 - 1947-1997 high rainfall patterns coinciding with economic growth and consumption
 - 1997-2040? Low rainfall patterns coinciding with unknown variables.

Comments on the regional and rural experience included:

- In general, towns are the smallest consumers of water in regional areas. Irrigators use the bulk of the available water. (SM)
- Major towns and cities, like Dubbo, on a regulated stream/river are in a reasonably good position. (SM)
- Despite water being available for town water purposes there is social and political pressure to save water. (SM)
- Lack of water in some of the smaller western towns will hasten their decline in population. (SM)
- Does the licensing of town water supplies need to be a higher security category to ensure supply if the drought continues. (Matt Fanning) PT responded that the license is adequate and separate from other security licenses.
- Regional cities with broad-based mixed economies will continue to be in a positive position. (SM)
- Irrigators and agriculture will bear the brunt of declining water availability. (SM)
- Is it possible that some councils or State Government will put an upper limit on the size of towns to ensure that growth does not outstrip infrastructure. (DM) Other participants thought this would be unlikely.
- Byron Bay has a sewerage moratorium which has effectively limited the growth of the township. (Phil Warner)
- Alternative water sources for cities that are running out of water, like Goulburn, have to be found immediately. (DM) Alternatives include groundwater, transfer of water from other catchments and water cartage.

- Over 100 bores have been put in during the current drought to assist with water sourcing. (PT)
- Before such drastic measures as population limits are established, the Government will investigate alternate water sources such as:
 - Desalination (increasingly affordable)
 - Potable reuse
 - Rainwater tanks
 - Greywater reuse
 - Thermal distillation (JA)
- Sydney Water customers need to adopt demand management tools immediately and in greater numbers than households have to date. (DM) The difference between water usage by residents in Sydney and regional NSW is large.
- DEUS is constantly monitoring the performance of councils and the figures show that regional councils are effectively using demand management to reduce water consumption. (PT)
- Water is currently priced too low and hence it encourages greater consumption. (Roger Milosh)
- Pricing changes need to be investigated to better manage the consumption of water. Pricing options include: (DM)
 - Step pricing
 - User pays
 - Access charges
 - Best Practice Guidelines
 - Integrated pricing
 - Volumetric charges

Other general comments included:

- Only Broken Hill in NSW has run out of water. Sydney's dams have been close to empty twice but each time the drought has been broken. (JA)
- Emergency management plans have been prepared but they do not assist with returning to normal operations after the emergency event has passed. (Matt Fanning)
- There appears to be no comparable examples in Australia for estimating the return to normal operations. (JA and PT)

In conclusion, each panel member provided the following comments:

- JA is currently planning for the drought to continue for another 10 years in the Gosford/Wyong area.
- SM recommended that every water authority should complete a Drought Management Plan and prepare for all contingencies.
- PT indicated that water sharing plans and reuse schemes have to be explored further and tailored to the local environment.
- DM suggested that community consultation is vital. Without introducing water restrictions, Albury Water has encouraged the community to reduce water usage by 35 per cent over the past 5 years.

WE NEED TO LEARN TO LIVE WITH THE LANDSCAPE!