

ORGANISATION REFORM TO ACHIEVE DEMOCRATIC AND SUSTAINABLE STORM- AND WASTEWATER OUTCOMES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

Notes distributed by Richard Clark for Community Water Summit
Alan Scott Auditorium, Hawke Centre, Adelaide
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Abstract. Progress in urban and regional water planning suited to a sustainable water future for South Australia is severely constrained by an inadequate organisational structure and vestige monopoly processes. Reform in these areas is urgently required to protect the public's long term interests. A more efficient and democratic water planning structure is proposed.

PRESENT SITUATION

1. Letters to Editors, Talk-back radio. Evidence of large and growing desire by members of public to see stormwater used as a water source. Many contributions also correctly note the link between better management of stormwater and reduction in flooding and coastal pollution and other benefits.
2. There is less interest in recycling greywater or treated wastewater, but there is pride in seeing wastewater put to productive uses, e.g. irrigation of crops and public open spaces as at Mawson Lakes
3. Adelaide recently hosted an International conference on "Creating Water Sensitive Cities". The link between future sustainability of cities and regions and the capture of stormwater and recycling of wastewater was a central theme of many contributors. Many also noted significant barriers to progress in these areas.
4. While there are some areas of good progress in South Australia (e.g. Salisbury council, CSIRO, Mawson Lakes, NRM goals), there is growing dissatisfaction with key senior politicians and State Govt public servants who have expressed negative or unhelpful views or appear to 'do nothing' while drawing a good salary at public expense.
 - Rann – "No South Australian will be asked to drink treated sewage"
 - Maywald – "Stormwater is too polluted to be used for drinking"
 - Mcleod (OWS) – "Dual pipe systems are too expensive"
 - Atkinson "Sewage is less risky than stormwater for treating to drinking standards"
 - DWLBC (i/c State Water Planning) – no urban water planning (inc. no adequate modelling of groundwater/ASR limits) over the past 15 years!
5. **The Govt appears fixated on defending its unpopular position re desalination of seawater by debasing the public's wishes to see stormwater and wastewater taken seriously as logical contenders for future water supplies rather than embracing a 'sustainable vision' in which stormwater and wastewater become central logical contenders to be investigated as primary sources of future water supplies.**

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WHY THIS LOG JAM? – Need to understand the history of water planning over the past 30 years.

6. Pre 1980- Old EWS as a Govt Dept. i/c State Water Planning. – Last comprehensive water plan (1974) determined that the R Murray was the best choice for Adelaide water supplies into foreseeable future.
7. 1980's : –
 - Recognition of growing water quality problems with R Murray. Six water treatment plants finalised.
 - Recognition of growing asset replacement problem – the old pipe systems were wearing out and the replacement costs would not be covered by the (then) price of water.
 - Emerging recognition of ESD, Adelaide wins MFP, first work on the water balance for Adelaide, first emergence of “alternative systems” by John Argue, Richard Clark, and Hickinbothom Homes.
8. 1990's : –
 - EWS Dept corporatised. Sole objectives to supply healthy and reliable water to public while making a 90\$m/a+ profit for govt. All water supply and wastewater infrastructure vested in SA Water. Governance by Govt appointed Board responsible directly to Minister. No revision of Waterworks (1932) and Wastewater Acts (1927) which continued to give SA Water a total monopoly. Olsen brags about SA Water corporatisation being “Best in World” model, no incentive to make changes.
 - Water resources planning (i.e. other than the water supply and sewerage functions) taken out of SA Water and rolled into Natural Resources Management Act. NRM Boards formed, but with responsibility only for ‘natural’ water (and not ‘engineered’ water). Considerable ambiguity in non SA Water area planning. Flooding with Dept of Transport. Water Quality with EPA.
 - No involvement or interest in “alternative urban water systems” displayed by State govt agencies over 20 year period, despite progress made by Local Govt, CSIRO and private developers, agencies and consultants.
9. 2000's : -
 - Rapid emergence of climate change impacts and parallel recognition by public of the need to move to more sustainable solutions. Highlighted by River Murray “collapse”
 - Past lack of progress by State Govt on “alternative systems” means that consequences of lack of basic homework emerge. i.e.:
 - No water balance clarification for present or future situations
 - No planning for urban spaces to capture stormwater
 - No adequate investigation of the capacity of aquifers to store water as part of a future dynamic water supply operation
 - No whole of life cost benefit study of alternative v traditional systems (inc comparative costs of traditional and alternative pipe systems)

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- HENCE inevitable “panic/knee-jerk” choice by Govt to adopt a desalination plant. Public see the very large cost and very large green-house energy requirements and feel betrayed that the feasibility of “alternative systems” has never been adequately investigated.

10. Present day : -

- a) We have inherited a situation in which SA Water has a monopoly on key elements of urban water supply planning without the incentive, responsibility, resources or structure to enable it to address the investigation or planning of stormwater and wastewater for the full range of multi-objective outcomes desired by the public.**
- b) We have no other State Govt Agency with authority over SA Water that could wrest this role from SA Water to meet public desires and expectations.**
- c) The new Office of Water Security (OWS) does not have this breadth of responsibility or established communication channels to undertake this role adequately. i.e.**
- d) WE HAVE A WATER PLANNING LOG JAM – one that is severely compromising the future of sustainable water planning in SA.**

WHAT TO DO?

11. Recognise that the water cycle works across both its ‘engineered’ and ‘natural’ segments and across all the water (and related land) services that the public need. Our highest water planning authority must have responsibility and access to information across both engineered and natural areas and must have close cooperation with urban and regional land planning.
12. CREATE A NEW (PUBLIC) WATER PLANNING DEPT from bits of existing Depts and SA Water that will be responsible for key water policies, investigations, licensing and policing across all water areas. Get this Dept to do a proper cost benefit study of the alternative v traditional water systems. This will require it to investigate decentralised water systems and possible strategies for progressive breaking up the existing large centralised systems. (The OWS is NOT doing this study!)
13. VEST ALL PUBLIC WATER SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE CROWN (water supply, sewerage, flood mitigation, pollution reduction). Create a Separate Agency responsible to the new planning dept to be responsible for establishment, operation standards, maintenance, licensing of operators, pricing, service performance, etc, of the ‘integrated’ water services system.
14. REMOVE MONOPOLY OPERATION FROM THE WATERWORKS AND SEWERAGE ACTS. Fully privatise SA Water under license and make its operations open to competition.
15. Express dissatisfaction to your local MP and give him a copy of these notes.