

Sydney's Water – Running Out?

Inside:

**Water use
in NSW** 1

**How to increase
water supply** 2

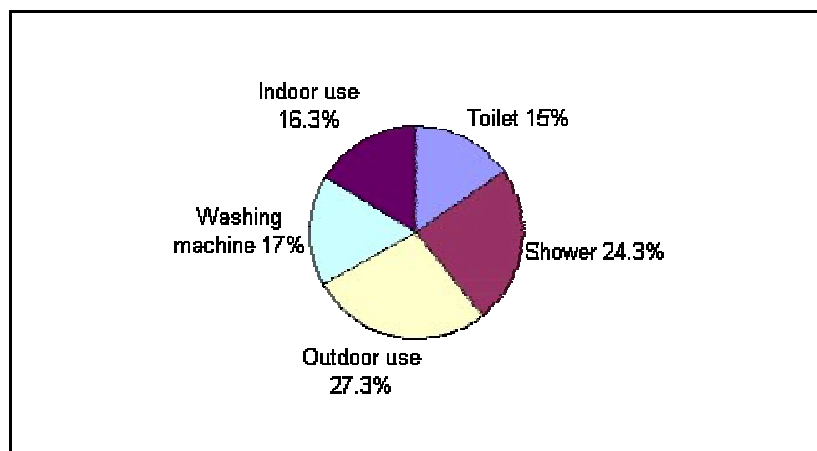
**Ideas for
sustainability** 3

**Institutional
Change** 4

NSW's continuing drought and the growing evidence of climate change reinforce the importance of living in a sustainable manner and minimising our impact on our environment. The water supply for Sydney and its surrounds is growing more precarious.

This issue looks at some of the proposals put forward by the Carr government to address water shortages, and at less drastic measures which could, rather than increasing water supply, reduce demand on existing supplies.

- Research by the CSIRO has forecasted that by 2015 there will be a national shortfall of water 275 gigalitres – about half of Sydney harbour. Sydney would need to cut its water usage by 54% to avoid the shortage.
- Sydney's current water reservoirs can safely yield around 600,000 ML a year. Sydney's water consumption has been above that for the past 3 years. On average, Sydney uses 106% of the annual sustainable yield of its water supplies.
- In the next 25 years, Sydney's population is projected to increase by one million people. If current water usage is maintained, Sydney will need an extra 200 billion litres of each year to supply its population.
- More than 60% of water usage in the Sydney area is by residential customers. A large part of that is used outside.



What is the government doing to address Sydney's Water Shortage?

In October 2004, the Carr Government released a comprehensive water strategy: "Meeting the Challenges - Securing Sydney's Water Future"

The report discussed a number of new sources for Sydney's water supply.

DESALINISATION PLANT

The government has announced that it is considering building a Desalination plant in NSW. The plant would be able to produce **100 mega litres of drinking water a day** by removing salt from seawater.

The energy costs of such a proposal are enormous. The plant could produce up to **255,500 tonnes of greenhouse gases a year** – the equivalent of putting 53,000 new cars on the state's roads. [SMH, 1/11/2004]

DEEP WATER FROM THE BOTTOM OF DAMS

New pumps are being built to access water stored in the deepest parts of Sydney's dams. There are **up to 30 million litres** of water that will become available by 2006 when the pumps are completed.

All of these measures would increase the amount of water available for use in Sydney and its surrounding areas, without changing the way that water is used. Is it a long term solution?

PUMPING WATER FROM THE SHOALHAVEN

Sydney already relies on water pumped through rivers from the Shoalhaven in times of drought. The government is proposing to build a permanent pipeline to take floodwaters from the Tallowa Dam on the Shoalhaven River, increasing Sydney's water supply by 50-80 million litres. The first part of this project would be completed in 2009. There are fears that taking water from the river when it is flowing at a high level could block the its tidal entrances or increase salinity, as well as cause further disruption to fish stocks and the rivers ecosystem.

This plan could increase Sydney's water supply by up to **100 billion litres in the next 25 years**. (4 billion litres a year)

WATER RECYCLING

The NSW government is investigating plans for recycling sewage effluent, grey water and storm water. A range of projects could produce **up to 60 million litres** of drinking water in the next 15 years.

Better ways to use our existing water supplies

DEMAND MANAGEMENT

Measures to manage demand of water include graded pricing schemes (higher tariffs for high water users), standards for water appliances and water restrictions. It has been argued that such methods could save 50 billion litres of water a year by 2029.

Proponents of demand management approaches talk of the idea of an “invisible dam” made up of conservation and recycling actions. Such an approach recognises and adapts to Australia’s dry climate rather than reinforcing water usage habits that aren’t suited to our environment.

For more information: Total Environment Centre (www.tec.nccnsw.org.au)

SUPPORTING WATER CONSCIOUS HOUSEHOLDS

The NSW government has a number of initiatives for reducing residential water use.

Retrofit program

Sydney water offers a retrofit service for \$22 (free for pensioners). The Service includes installation of a water saving shower head, installation of water-efficient aerators or flow regulators, water saving adjustments to single flush toilets and repair of minor indoor and outdoor leaks. Houses with the retrofit **save an average of 21,000 litres of water a year.**

Water Tank Rebate

Rainwater collected in tanks can easily be used for toilets, washing machines and outdoor water use. Installing a water tank can reduce water bills and pressure on Sydney’s water supply. Sydney water offers rebates of between \$150-\$650 depending on the tank’s capacity and whether a toilet or washing machine is attached to the tank. Many local councils are waiving requirements for development applications for water tanks.

For more information: www.sydneywayter.com.au and your local council

Water Conservation for New Homes

The BASIX scheme requires that all new houses reduce water use by 40% and energy use by 25%. Landcom, the development arm of the NSW government, is pioneering water conscious communities in NSW, including Victoria Park in Sydney’s South, and Rouse Hill water recycling schemes.

for more information see www.landcom.nsw.gov.au

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You can read past
issues of
Watermark
on our website.

Institutional Change

Institutions like schools, churches and community organisations can make a huge contribution to water saving initiatives. Taking actions like installing water tanks can both save large amounts of water, and serve as a tool for educating the community as to the possibilities for changing the way we use water.

ORGANISATIONAL PLANNING AND CHOOSING THE FUTURE

- with guidance from the Earth Charter

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just sustainable and peaceful global society. It recognises that everything is interlinked, including the environment, justice, the economy, ways of living together and spiritual ideas. Religious Orders are well placed to lead by example in implementing the kinds of creative changes that are needed if we are to become a society that has a "new reverence for life and the firm resolve to achieve sustainability...."

The Edmund Rice Centre has set up an Earth Charter project which among other things offers to:

- Facilitate a workshop for school or organisational leaders who wish to consider the implications of becoming more ecologically sustainable as an organisation.
- Facilitate leaders in determining priority areas for implementing sustainability initiatives in their organisation or school
- Facilitate the trial and evaluation of initiatives by helping leaders devise their own appropriate sustainability indicators to monitor progress
- Assist in designing and facilitating school workshops and learning programs based on Earth Charter themes
- Provide workshops on worm farming, composting, food growing, permaculture, eco-footprint and other practical sustainable living skills

Contact Jill Finnane at the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education - ph 9764 1330, email jill@erc.org.au

For information and ideas about how to save water at home see

www.sydneywater.com.au, www.h2ouse.org

It's important to remember that access to water is an international issue. 2005 is the start of the UN's 'Water for Life' Decade. For more information, see www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/