

A vertical collage of five images: a hand holding a small green seedling, a yellow windmill, two people looking at a map, a butterfly on a flower, and a brick building.

A policy approach to improving on-farm irrigation; *or* ‘Water for the Future’ and its intersection with the irrigation industry

Richard McLoughlin

Assistant Secretary (National Irrigation Efficiency)

Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water,
Heritage and the Arts

22 May 2008



First some history;

November 2007 Federal election: ALP policy statement

- High level policy commitments:
 - “Show national leadership to end the blame game, working cooperatively with the States.”
 - “Develop a truly national plan that brings together the existing urban and rural strategies into a single, coherent strategy focussed on rapidly improving water use and infrastructure, and preparing for less water because of climate change.”
 - “Maintain the integrity of the *National Plan for Water Security* ...”





2007 Federal election: ALP policy

- Specific project commitments, for example in NSW, Vic, Tasmania and Western Australia:
 - “... up to \$400 million to reduce evaporation and improve water efficiency at Menindee Lakes, secure Broken Hill’s water supply, protect local environment and heritage and return 200 GL to the MDB.”
 - “Up to \$124 million further investment in the Wimmera Mallee pipeline”
 - “... \$140 million for supporting more efficient irrigation in Tasmania”;
 - “... up to \$12 million to fund the missing link pipeline between Warren and Nyngan ... to provide greater water security for the communities of Cobar and Nyngan and return up to 2 GL per year to the Basin.”
 - “Up to \$4 million for recycled water use by Delta Electricity at Lithgow”
 - \$49 million for the Harvey Water piping project and \$6.6 million for the Gascoyne irrigation pipeline project





April 2008: 'Water for the Future'

- Provides a 'unifying framework' for urban and rural water policy reforms and programs
 - high level objectives
 - policy and administrative reforms
 - re-scoping of major current programs
- Formalises pre-election policy commitments.
- Funding of \$12.9 billion over ten years.





Water for the Future high level objectives

- Climate adaptation
- Using water wisely
- Securing water supplies
- Healthy rivers and waterways

(See Minister Wong' speeches of 7 and 29 April 2008 for details)





Water for the Future programs

- All current major water rural programs (from the ‘\$10 billion plan’) (see next slides)
 - National Urban Water and Desalination Plan (\$1 billion)
- Three new urban programs
 - National Water Security Plan for Cities and Towns (\$250 million)
 - National Rainwater and Greywater Initiatives (\$250 million)
- Other continuing programs
 - details announced in the budget





Water for the Future major ‘rural’ programs

- Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program (\$5.8 billion)
 - includes infrastructure investments for improving the efficiency and productivity of water use and management, such as Basin State ‘priority projects’ under the MOU.
- Restoring the Balance in the Basin Program (\$3.1 billion) for purchasing water entitlements
 - \$50 million of purchasing occurring now.
- Improving Water Information (\$450 million)
 - through the Bureau of Meteorology.





Implementation arrangements

- All Water for the Future programs to address the four high level objectives and be:
 - undertaken cooperatively with the States
 - subject to more specific requirements if ‘priority infrastructure projects’ under the MOU:
 1. secure a long term sustainable future for irrigation communities ... and demonstrate a long term economic and environmental benefit that can be sustained over a 20 year horizon;
 2. deliver substantial and lasting returns of water to the environment to secure real improvements in river health, with entitlements to be held by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder; and
 3. deliver value for money (cost-benefit analysis and cost per ML saved for delivery to the environment).
 - private irrigation corporations to be invited to participate later this year.





Specific programs now rolling out:

- Modernisation Planning Assistance – 20 year strategic plans for irrigation districts
- Water Loss ‘Hot Spots’ – comprehensive methodology for assessing delivery system efficiency
- On-farm pilot projects – testing different delivery mechanisms/partners for improving on-farm water use efficiency
- Election commitments for irrigation (Tas, WA, NSW)





Some conclusions, in the context of 'Water for the Future'

- In recent years irrigation operations have clearly shifted from *supply management* to *demand management* to account for crop needs more closely.
- Irrigation system performance now critical – this includes both on-farm and bulk water delivery systems
- A more integrated approach to considering water use efficiency (when considering investment) makes sense





Some conclusions (continued)

- ‘Integrated’ - means considering more than just on-farm water use efficiency when considering capital investment. It includes considering current and future water availability, water markets, crop types, metering/telemetry, delivery system capacity, etc
- It also means consideration of the three ‘tests’ from the Water for the Future Policy (ie. viable irrigation communities, water for the environment, value for money)
- Finally, Australia is not alone in undertaking major irrigation system upgrades at national level – also currently occurring in US, EU, China, India, Pakistan, etc, in response to over-use, salinity, pollution and climate change





Thank you

- End of presentation
 - Questions ?