Australia’s National Water Quality Management Strategy

Charles Edlington- National Water Policy
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A water reform pathway...

Reform will need to reflect, and be sensitive to:

- country specific needs
- cultural traditions
- urban form, and
- level of development and income.

However, common principles may generally apply.
Water reform in Australia

Drivers of reform

- financially unsustainable and subsidised water businesses and irrigation areas
- Poor drinking water quality and levels of service in many regional towns and cities
- widespread environmental degradation.

Objectives of reform

- transform water allocation
- reform water pricing – user pays
- modernise institutional arrangements
- improve environmental management.
National framework for jurisdictional implementation

- State and Territory Governments are responsible for water quality protection and management

- The Commonwealth Government supports the overarching framework - the National Water Quality Management Strategy

Map courtesy of Map Australia (www.street-map.net.au)
Further drivers of a National Water Quality Management Strategy

- Salinity increasing in the Murray River
- 1981- Murray Mouth Closed
- 1000 Km toxic Algae bloom in the Darling River
National Water Quality Management Strategy

Water Quality is health, not just human health

- Environmental- aquatic ecosystems, riparian vegetation, wetlands, estuaries
- Economic- productivity, treatment and/or transport costs, tourism.
- Social- loss of recreation, cultural and spiritual sites
National Water Quality Management Strategy – cont’d

Designed for: Protecting Australia’s Water Resources by Improving Water Quality and Reducing Pollution

• Recognition of benefits to a national collaborative effort
  • reduced costs to governments, industry and consumers
  • better environmental outcomes

• Risk management framework

• Water for all its uses

• First documents released in 1994
National Water Quality Management Strategy – cont’d

Three Key Parts:

• Policy
• Process
• Guidelines
The Guidelines

- Authoritative guides for setting water quality objectives
- Cover wide range of water quality issues
- Nationally agreed, technical Guidance
- Non mandatory
- Currently >20, will rationalise <10
Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality (2000)

Fresh and Marine Water Quality Guidelines for the protection of aquatic ecology

Tools for assessing and managing ambient water quality in natural and semi-natural water resources.
The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines

• 1972- “Desirable Standards for Public Water Supplies in Australian Capital Cities”

• Established before the National Water Quality Management Strategy

• National Health and Medical Research Council have primary carriage
The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines – cont’d

A framework for the management of drinking water supplies that assures safety at the point of use.

- best available scientific evidence
- National development, local implementation
- Not mandatory
Six fundamental principles

1. Pathogens present the greatest risks
2. The system should have robust multiple protective barriers
3. Any sudden or extreme change should arouse suspicion of contamination
4. System operators should respond quickly to adverse monitoring signals.
5. System operators must maintain a personal sense of responsibility and dedication to providing consumers with safe water.
6. Application of a considered risk management approach.
The Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling

Four Guidelines

1. Managing Health and Environmental risks
2. Augmentation of drinking water supplies
3. Stormwater harvesting and reuse
4. Managed Aquifer Recharge
Summary

• Country specific, risk-based, national framework for jurisdictional implementation

• The National Water Quality Management Strategy consists of three key parts - Policy, Process and Guidelines

• The Guidelines provide nationally agreed, expert technical guidance on a wide range of water quality issues – at least cost
  • The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and the Stormwater Recycling Guidelines provide a framework that assures safety at the point of use.
Thank You

charles.edlington@agriculture.gov.au