



The Sustainable Engineering Society

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COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE STATEMENT FROM SENG

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Water infrastructure has seen growing investment over the last decade, prompted by record droughts and water security concerns. It is important that government and industry build on this momentum and implement the key reforms needed for Australia to remain a world leader in water resource management

Although it is relatively wet now, droughts will come again. We need to ensure that we are ready.

There are new challenges in managing environment water. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan (MDBP), a historic moment in water resource management in Australia, sets new thresholds for water consumption and the identification of environmental flow needs. The federal government is now the biggest holder of water in the Murray-Darling Basin and will be actively using their entitlement to water environmental assets. It will take many years to get environmental watering right but the public will want assurance that the investments in environmental water are leading to better environmental outcomes. In tight budgetary times, the first things that go are research and monitoring – both of which are vital to demonstrate the effectiveness of environmental watering. Governments must revert to treating research and monitoring as priorities, as well as the catchment programs that previously supported collective action and community involvement.

New developments in water infrastructure and water use, for example initiatives to develop water resources in Northern Australia, should take into account the mistakes of the southern systems. Engineering and science must be the foundation for any developments in order to achieve a sustainable future that protects the environment and enables economic growth.

It would be a mistake to save now on infrastructure and asset management as Australians in future generations will pay later. The easy option- reduction of maintenance and renewal funding to decrease customer prices -leads to underinvestment in infrastructure, poor levels of service, increased customer frustration, more waste, and increased prices over the long-term.

Both the Coalition, with their proposed Dams Taskforce and planning of new dam infrastructure, and the Labor Party must heed this advice if water management is to continue successfully in Australia's future.

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