

Economic Regulation Authority
Level 6 Governor Stirling Tower
197 St Georges Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Sirs/Mme,

I wish to submit my observations on this issue for your consideration, both as a keen gardener/ water user and employee of a corporate body involved in water supply and treatment.

I have lived and worked in many countries, from parched mid-east deserts to lush forested countries on the equator and colder climates in the northern hemisphere. The one common denominator they all have is a need for fresh water, at whatever cost the population is willing to pay. In Saudi Arabia water costs more than petrol, in Canada it is virtually free, except for operational costs (although energy costs a lot more- for heating) and other places sit somewhere between.

Australia must move towards a user pays situation, where an equitable rate is developed to permit sustainable development, but still permit a degree of choice by individuals, to use this limited resource as they wish.

It is not government's place to dictate that a resident cannot have a lush tropical garden in a dry climate- it is a matter for that person to determine what he or she is willing to pay for that privilege. (e.g. any Mid-east major city boulevards!)

If an industry wishes to operate in WA, rather than say, Tasmania, and is a high water user, then they should be able to do so- but pay their fair share of the cost of that precious resource, at least at the same rate as private householders.

Subsidies to all users should be reduced to zero over the short to medium term and all users should pay on a consumption basis- that includes ground water wells, river extraction for farm or other uses and any structure (such as dams) that stops runoff water reaching streams or ground water intake zones. You only have to look at places like Jackadder Lake in Woodlands to see the effect of draw-down on the water table in summer, it only just filled up this month.

The current level of charging in Perth is ludicrous, considering the population growth and cost of providing new sources; if we as residents were prepared to pay a more reasonable amount- at least double the current rates- then the Water Corp could and would be able to provide a guaranteed supply well into next century. That might even include a pipeline from the north and certainly one from the south west Yarragadee borefields.

Ways must also be found to accelerate the use of grey water and permit householders to put this otherwise wasted resource to good use on their gardens.

Small water tanks on private property are a waste of time and money- they save maybe \$1 or \$2 worth of water and would last one or two retic sessions watering the garden!

Larger communal tanks spread throughout the suburbs might have a place- for instance where those local catchpit/soak-well lots exist and there are quite a few of them! Also, how about catching rainwater runoff from streets and buildings and storing that for later use, using pumps into a distribution system for grey water?

Pricing should be related to supply/demand considerations and not what other states pay- as our climate regime is totally different to the eastern states of Australia. Comparing WA to other dry (civilised) countries would be more relevant; e.g. mid-southern States of USA and California, countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, Mexico, west coastal Sth. America and south west Africa. Government subsidies would rule out comparison with Middle East countries (the biggest users of Desalinated water) as the "user pays" concept has not really been embraced there and energy costs are minimal.

Seasonal variations in cost are not needed, as water usage in Perth/WA is directly related to season already- Summer/Autumn is the only time when excessive water use tends to occur and needs controlling and this can be done with an incremental consumption charge.

People watering in winter should be fined (after the first warning) double the cost of the water used plus a fee, to deter this anti-social behaviour- this includes Councils and all Corporate bodies. We pay land tax on the "rental value" of our property, perhaps a "water usage value" should be allocated to each property and much higher charges be made when this threshold is exceeded. I'm sure a simple calculation based on land area and number of potential occupants could be developed- using current consumption data already held by the authorities.

*Regards,
Ian Barnes*