

Office of Water Regulation

SUBMISSION ON WATER & WASTEWATER PRICING

I submit that the pricing model adopted should ensure adequate resources are available to thoroughly investigate, develop and monitor existing and future groundwater resources required to ensure an adequate supply of water into the future.

It must also allow for adequate resources to thoroughly investigate, develop and monitor environmentally responsible waste water treatment and reuse and treatment of water of otherwise unsuitable quality.

There are a number of facets of the existing systems that are unsatisfactory.

There is also inadequate examination of alternatives to the existing policies to ensure they are the most appropriate.

For example:

1. The government has adopted a plan to deep sewer all developed areas in WA when alternative much more economic independent waste water treatment systems could be installed in individual properties. These systems provide much less damage to the environment than the existing disposal systems from the major treatment works. The only justification for the more expensive system currently adopted is if the waste water is treated to reuse quality and therefore fully recovered.
2. We have the Water Corporation network which has to supply water throughout the state with the obvious higher costs associated with this being restrained in cost recovery by two independent (Aqwest & Busselton) localised systems which could be grossly inefficient and still supply water at a fraction of the Water Corporation cost. Bearing in mind the obvious benefit of equalising of pricing, these two independent systems need to be incorporated into the state wide system to ensure efficient operation and revenue flow back to the state to contribute to finance of the resources required.
3. Comparing pricing in WA with other states is irrelevant as the sources of water are totally different and the size of the distribution systems is also different. Utilisation of groundwater requires much higher levels of research and management and also water treatment.
4. There is inadequate research into the use of wastewater and groundwater reserves of lower quality water. For example research overseas has demonstrated that injecting waste water into underground aquifers effectively kills all bacteria including those that closed down Sydney's water supply and resulted in the installation of very expensive high filtration systems. We have extensive aquifers containing water of TDS higher than 1,500mg/l that could be supplemented with waste or drainage water or treated in other ways. These include the Yarragadee aquifer immediately south of the river which offers many alternative scenarios for future utilisation.

5. We currently utilise less than 5% of water supplied for human consumption, however, we treat the whole 100% supplied to this high level of quality. Common sense dictates that we supply water for human consumption only via a separate reticulation system. This will require modification to current health department regulations and possible other regulations to protect from litigation from people using the secondary supply inappropriately. This would also allow potentially increased quality standards for drinking water with appropriate pricing mechanisms.

The reason the W&RC is unable to give clear guidance on the development of the Yarragadee aquifers is that there has been inadequate resources applied to the modelling of these systems which is typical of the level of research applied to all of the above issues.

It is absolutely crucial if we are to obtain the best and most cost effective water and wastewater management systems available that this research be adequately managed and funded.

It is equally essential that this research be managed by an appropriate body independent of the vested interests contained within the current water and wastewater management bodies.

Robert Bowyer
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23rd July 2004