

# Urban Water

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## AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN URBAN WATER CLIMATE CHANGE, LAND AND WATER

Australians live on the driest inhabited continent in the world and with highest variability in rainfall. Yet we have the highest residential water use and the highest level of embodied water in our goods and services. Climate change means our water resources must cope with changed rainfall patterns; our rainfall will increase in the north and decrease for current water stores along the east coast.

*“We can and must do much better in improving the efficiency of water usage in urban areas”*

**Senator Andrew Bartlett**  
Environment  
Spokesperson

Water restrictions now apply to over 70% of Australians yet only 3% of urban rainfall is captured and our water is the third cheapest internationally. We must do better. We must reduce water waste, increase appropriate water reuse and extract less water from the environment. Adoption of this plan would avoid the need for new dams and desalination plants and put urban water use on a sustainable footing.

### Action Agenda

- Develop an integrated, strategic **National Urban Water Policy**, informed by a **national accounting program** for water resources and use and underpinned by agreed **targets** delivering short and long term water sustainability, taking into account climate change, population and environment needs.
- **Work with all state and local governments** to overcome the jurisdictional barriers to nationally-consistent planning, regulation and practice in water use.
- Encourage the states to reform urban water pricing to fund, over the next 20 years, a **major public investment in water infrastructure**, replacing outdated plant and pipework, progressively installing 3<sup>rd</sup> pipe networks for effluent reuse, and building small scale stormwater capture and sewage treatment works.
- Encourage state and local governments to **develop standards, guidelines and targets for water saving measures**
- Help **fund more generous rebate programs** to retrofit plumbing devices for all sectors to reduce water use and losses and install rainwater tanks and grey water systems connected to cisterns and laundries
- Extend the Democrats-initiated Water Efficiency and Labelling Scheme for showerheads, washing machines, dishwashers and toilets to **minimum water efficiency standards** set at 5 star by 2010 and 10 star by 2020.
- **Introduce mandatory consumption targets** in water service provider licences and/or revenue caps for retail water distributors.
- Conduct a **national water use information campaign**



Other ACTION PLANS are available online at  
[www.democrats.org.au](http://www.democrats.org.au)

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- Establish a **National Business Water Program** auditing all large water users and mandatory targets for reducing, reusing and substituting water.
- Tighten standards for the **industrial discharge** of heavy metals, salt and other substances that hinder treatment for effluent reuse.

## The Issues - Water Management

Despite water restrictions now being required in many cities, overall demand is still increasing due to our growing population, growing affluence and a failure to adequately embrace efficiencies. According to the ABS water account for 2005, 66% of all the water is used by agriculture. Households in every city and town across Australia use 11%. Manufacturing, commerce and industry use about 9%. Electricity and gas production, 1%, and mining 2% and about 11% unaccounted for like water losses and meter errors. In our cities, water is used on gardens and lawns (34%), in the bathroom (26%), toilet (20%), laundry (15%) and kitchen (5%).

Some cities and towns are harvesting water from aquifers at a greater rate than they are being recharged. In other locations, the quantity and quality of raw water in catchments are under pressure from agriculture and logging. Despite the pressure on water supplies, the price of Australian water is still low and does not take into account all the associated costs of infrastructure and environment.

Better water management in Australia is still hampered by outdated and wasteful attitudes to stormwater and effluent use, century old infrastructure, a lack of research and nationally consistent standards and a reluctance to raise revenue from water pricing to fix environmental problems caused by water use.

Options will include urban systems that recycle grey water and treat stormwater as a resource rather than a waste product. Effluent can be a viable substitute for potable water used in irrigation if the price signals are right. Indirect potable reuse is a cost-effective approach in many locations. Stringent water consumption targets, education and tighter appliance standards will all help conserve water.