



WLS SUB 31.



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The Principal Research Officer
Economics and Industry Standing Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Inquiry into Water Licensing and Services.

By email: laeisc@parliament.wa.gov.au

The Conservation Council of WA has been an outspoken advocate for the environment since 1967. The Conservation Council of WA has been a key stakeholder in conservation of water, rivers, lakes, wetlands, groundwater and water dependant flora and fauna which are key goals for the sustainable development of Western Australia.

Conservation Council of WA has been an active participant in water reform processes for more than two decades, and strongly involved in the WA Water Reform process of the past three years. The Conservation Council of WA is recognised as working closely with the Department of Water in the drafting process for the new Water Resources Legislation expected to be tabled in Parliament early next year.

The State Water Plan was established earlier this year following the Premier Alan Carpenter agreeing to sign onto the National Water Initiative, in line with COAG reforms. The importance of the health of rivers, lakes, wetlands and groundwater should be the prime focus of a State Water Plan that seeks to plan, manage and protect the uses of water throughout Western Australia statewide. Stewardship of the common good of water is vital for the future sustainable development of Western Australia. Water is derived and extracted for human use from the environment; this extraction is often in conflict with *in situ* and intrinsic environmental uses. Consequently the State Water Plan acknowledges this and seeks to establish a plan for the health of water, rivers, lakes, wetlands, groundwater and water dependant flora and fauna, **AND** for the sustainable use of water for human uses for the next century.

Clearly an open, fair, equitable, transparent and independently administered licencing regime is crucial to the success of the first raft of implementation measures of the State Water Plan. Sustainability of environmental values, environmental water requirements and environmental flows is a crucial component of a rigorous and compliant water licencing regime. Full environmental cost recovery must be applied for any withdrawal of water from the environment. Any interception of surface water or groundwater has an environmental impact that must be assessed and mitigated.

The Conservation Council of WA contends that in the face of climate change, increasing temperatures and changing and variable rainflow patterns across the State, a rigorous accounting system must be implemented that clearly sets Western Australia on a path

towards sustainability. The Precautionary Principle outlined in the Environmental Protection Act 1986 should be paramount:

Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

This is not an esoteric policy statement, but something that **must** be applied at all levels of Government business.

Western Australia is in a fortunate situation relative to other State jurisdictions – few water management areas are at a situation of over-allocation. However this formal statewide identification is based on largely inadequate monitoring data. Recidivist failures by the Water and Rivers Commission and its bureaucratic replacement the Department of Water to ensure compliance with Ministerial conditions regarding the extraction of water from the various aquifers of the Gnangara Mound is a permanent stain and impediment on the achievement of ecological sustainability for Western Australia.

An absolute minimum standard of water accounting and accountability is for ALL dams, groundwater bores and other water intercepting structures to be identified. This applies equally to farm dams as well as domestic groundwater bores. At this stage there is no single database that can identify the location and usage of every one of these structures. This lack of information must be remedied forthwith.

It is the Conservation Council's contention that all farm dams, irrigation bores, domestic bores must be licenced. All licenced extraction of water from surface or groundwater systems must be accounted for on a volumetric basis, taking into account water management administration costs which must embody full environmental cost recovery.

If water trading systems are to be implemented in Western Australia, then the preceding minimum requirements must be established.

In addition to making this submission, the Conservation Council of WA request meeting the Committee in due course to give evidence in support of the submission.

Please contact Steven McKiernan on 9420 7266 if you would like to further discuss the Conservation Council's concerns.

Yours sincerely

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