

The Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn's Sustainable Water Policy

At its October 2007 meeting, Bishop in Council endorsed Synod's resolution to *shrink our environmental footprint* (1053/07). This Diocesan Sustainable Water Policy is one element aimed at achieving this goal. The policy seeks to shift the Diocesan use of water on to a more sustainable basis as our decisions regarding sustainable water use are, ultimately, a moral choice. In doing so Bishop in Council seeks to achieve a balance between the economic, environmental and social aspects of water systems purchasing decisions as well as water use.

Principles

It is essential that we recognize that the choices made by individuals, communities such as churches, and by society at large regarding sustainable water use are, fundamentally, moral choices. This is especially true for Christians and this policy aims to provide a framework from which our Christian community can make informed choices toward effective actions.

Resource stewardship. The community needs to learn to allocate its water in relation to the relative security of supply from available sources, and the relative importance of demands for the different grades of water. Most precious (secure) is water from reliable sources that is suitable for drinking. Next is previously used water: in many societies, households use rinse and washing water for gardens etc; farms use irrigation water multiple times via terraced fields and simple collection and return structures. Finally, there are insecure supplies from occasional rains which can be harvested and stored for later use. Communal long term secure stored water should be used sparingly in good times and reserved for use in bad times. Unfortunately, we have developed policies and structures that depend almost exclusively on long-term reserve storages, and have lost sight of the importance of local secure and opportunistic sources.

We need to preserve the reticulated mains supply for potable needs so that it is used only after other available sources (from grey-water and rainwater) have been used for 'fit for purpose' uses. It is too easy to simply turn on the tap for town water. We need to take more responsibility for choosing the right water for the right task and let our political masters know that this is the preferred direction of change in policy. We are then in a position to have technology make water available, rather than drawing so heavily from the natural environment

Equity & Justice. The water sharing systems of many ancient societies had equity as central in the allocation decision. These societies recognised that the basis of most conflict and dispute was over sharing arrangements and developed elaborate systems to ensure that essential needs were met with a fair basis for water sharing.

The question of equity has only just surfaced as a social issue in the Australian water debate and the church, along with other groups in society must actively seek to find ways to establish equity as the central core in water use. Appropriate policy, standards and delivery mechanisms are central to issues of equity and justice. In cities and towns, the use of drinking-quality water for most in-house and external uses exacerbates artificial water shortages in times of drought. That is, water of drinking quality is preferred for all uses, whereas many uses should be met by grades of water other than of drinking water standard. In country areas also the sustainable use of water resources of various qualities for farming, and environmental maintenance is essential. Wastage and inefficient use of this limiting resource must be avoided. We need to establish a 'fit for purpose' portfolio of supply sources of various qualities, and to engage technology so as to optimise our use of these.

Environmental literacy To take up our role in environmental stewardship is to become aware, interested, and then knowledgeable about the important relationships that shape the landscapes of Australia. This 'landscape literacy' is a knowledge that is vital for the survival of any society, but especially for one that wields technical muscle on a scale ours does. Revisiting and relearning this lesson is necessary if our society is to understand the problems that we face and to give context to necessary remedial action.

How many of us can name one local native plant flowering on the banks of our rivers, much less any of the myriad of insects, fungi and microorganisms found there? How many of us can say what role they fulfil or how they live? What do we understand of the services they contribute to our well being, and what are the consequences and options when species are removed by incompatible use of resources, loss of habitat, pollution or climate change? Our first step then as Christians and as a Christian community is to be aware of our environment and more literate as to what it is and what it contributes to our well-being. In the present context understanding the role of water in establishing and maintaining the landscapes of Australia is essential.

Similar issues arise with farming. How is water used on farms? What uses can the Australian community and environment afford? Where and what are the sources of inefficiencies and how may they be ameliorated? What is the responsibility of town and city dwellers in making a difference to life 'on the farm' and how may this be achieved?

An educated and committed Christian community is essential.

Actions

Accordingly, Bishop in Council requires all agency decisions that, directly or indirectly, involve water use, to follow the Diocesan Sustainable Water Policy.

When **building** new, or redeveloping old, facilities, agencies must abide by the following process:

1. Unless given a specific exemption after an examination of practicality, costs and benefits, parishes and other diocesan entities will develop their proposals according to the Diocesan Green Building Policy .
2. All buildings and refits must reach the standards provided in the Diocesan Green Building Policy
3. If approval is obtained to not meet the standards, a short statement setting out the agency's rationale should be provided to the Diocesan Registrar (to allow the Commission to identify systemic problems in the policy).

For **managed** facilities

1. Registry to assemble factual information on the status of water use across diocesan facilities by
 - documenting water sources for all facilities, provide a condition assessment, and identify storage capacity and consumption volume
 - documenting all wastewater disposal & septic treatment facilities
 - compiling a needs assessment statement & priority list.
2. Ensure the minimum volumes of the lowest grade water fit for purpose are used.

Water **users** are required to:

1. Ensure water is not wasted by auditing water use and carrying out the necessary repairs as described in the Green Guide for Parishes (see Commission website).
2. Upgrading facilities or changing sources where necessary to ensure the minimum volumes of the lowest grade water fit for purpose are used (eg adding rainwater tanks or changing to dual flush cisterns).

Parishioners should apply the same standards in their domestic, farming and business facilities.

The policy will be reviewed as often as is necessary and at no longer than two year intervals to ensure that the benchmarks set are at an appropriate level and that the policy is achieving its desired outcome. The information gathered will be used to assess the policy's effect on shrinking our environmental footprint.