

water: *our wake-up call*

When water's in trouble, we all are.

We should be worried. The water crisis we now face is deeper and more profound than the current drought. It is accentuated when we factor in climate change and its potentially significant impacts, particularly on the eastern part of Australia where most of us live.

We are one of the highest per-capita users of water on Earth. Yet many of our provincial towns are running out of water. Despite massive storage capacity, most of our capital cities face dwindling supplies of stored water. Our surface and groundwater resources are substantially over-allocated, and many of our freshwater ecosystems are in urgent need of repair. Farming communities, who put much of the food on our tables, are being squeezed by prolonged drought and are now having to compete with others in the trade of water. Inexplicably complacent, we have been slow to realise the need for efficiency in the way we use, and reuse, water across all sectors: agriculture, industry and households.

This water crisis has been in the making for decades. It has grown under the watch of numerous state, territory and federal governments. Its complex genesis has not been grasped by business and the marketplace. All the while, we have ramped up our levels of consumerism, seemingly oblivious to the impacts on our water resources.

A crisis represents a turning point, in which decisive change is needed. This is now the case with water. What are we to do in this vast, fragile and ancient continent?

Invariably, solutions are only as good as the analysis of the problem. The first part of this document, the Big Picture,

brings together the information people need to understand the dimensions of this water crisis and to help determine what we should do about it.

We propose a goal that focuses on water efficiency across all sectors of society. This is not only a timely commitment, but also an infinitely better option than the quick-fix mentality that seeks to augment water supplies without seriously addressing the present unsustainably high levels of water use.

The second part of the document outlines a set of guiding principles and the range of actions we can take to conserve this precious resource, wherever we live, and whatever we do – on farms, in businesses, organisations and in households. Importantly, as citizens, we will need to work with one another, talk with our political representatives at every tier of government and decide how to make best use of our vote.

Previous generations faced and overcame major challenges, such as economic depression and war. Finding solutions to our water problems now, and into the future, is a challenge of a similarly high order. There are few opportunities for us to grasp the nature and extent of the crisis we now face. However, this document represents an important opportunity to do so. So, when you come into possession of *Our Water Mark*, take the time over the next two to three weeks to read it – from cover to cover. Yes, it is a lengthy document, but there are many interlocking parts to the water story and they are all important! Urge your friends, family members and workmates to obtain a copy and read it, too. And talk with one another about it over the coming months.

A crisis as deep and threatening as this presents us all with choices and opportunities. We can cross our fingers, leave it to others, and hope it will all work out for the best. Or we can be active agents in our social, economic and environmental world, choosing to become informed and increasingly water literate, seeking out the truth of the matter, taking responsibility, and being prepared to act, together where possible, for the common good.

We can all make our mark in water reform. There are all sorts of possibilities. But we need to get going. We don't have the luxury of lots of time.

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