



“The amount of water we use in our homes, flats and gardens makes Australians among the highest domestic water users in the world ...”

The Pacific Institute calculates that the minimum amount of water needed for ‘drinking, human sanitation and moderate domestic use’ is 40 litres/person/day.

PH Gleick (ed.), *Water in crisis: A guide to the world's fresh water resources*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993

Australian households directly consume a significant amount of water every day, placing us among the greatest per-capita users of water in the world.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that in 2004–05 the yearly domestic consumption of water was 103 000 L per person, equating to 282 L per person per day.¹

According to these figures, an average Australian family of four is likely to directly consume

between 1100 and 1150 L of water per day, every day of the year. It is also possible to calculate the daily direct consumption per person per day in each state and territory in Australia. The rates of consumption are as follows:

- Victoria – 222 L
- New South Wales – 230 L
- South Australia – 258 L
- ACT – 260 L
- Queensland – 340 L
- Tasmania – 392 L
- Northern Territory – 419 L
- Western Australia – 493 L

In 2000, among 31 OECD countries, Australia ranked third in daily urban water consumption (321 L per person), behind the USA (515 L per person) and Canada (438 L per person). Denmark ranked lowest at 120 L per person.²

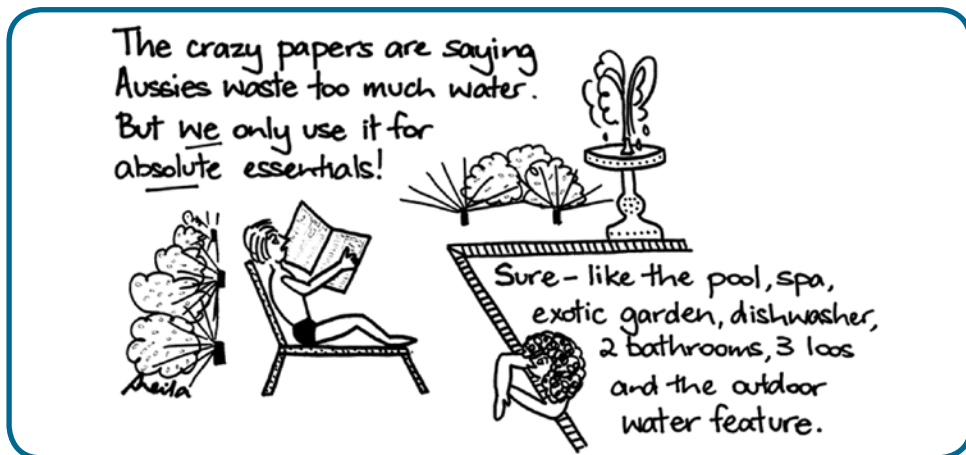
In our cities, household water is used in the following way:

- gardens and lawn (34%)
- bathroom (26%)

- toilet (20%)
- laundry (15%) and
- kitchen (5%).³

While these figures reflect general usage patterns, there are significant variations in the quantum of water used per capita. The age of occupants appears to be a major determinant here. A survey carried out by the Melbourne City Council suggests that younger, high-rise dwellers (18 to 40 years) are far less concerned about making water savings.⁴

In high-rise apartments, very little water is used outside the building. Usually, from the first floor up, gardens and lawns have been eliminated. However, this does not mean that there are commensurate domestic water savings. The same survey of four apartment buildings in the Melbourne CBD found that 70% of household water use was accounted for by showers. Around 60% of the dwellings did not have water-saving showerheads. Average water consumption in the four apartment blocks was in the range of 329–673 L per day.⁵



THE BIG PICTURE households



Water consumption patterns in single-person dwellings can also differ from general usage patterns. Recent research reveals particular patterns of consumption within the domestic water-use sector. Commonly, water-use projections are derived from expected population growth only. But when these projections are recalculated to take into account changing household types and, in particular, the increasing numbers of single-person dwellings,

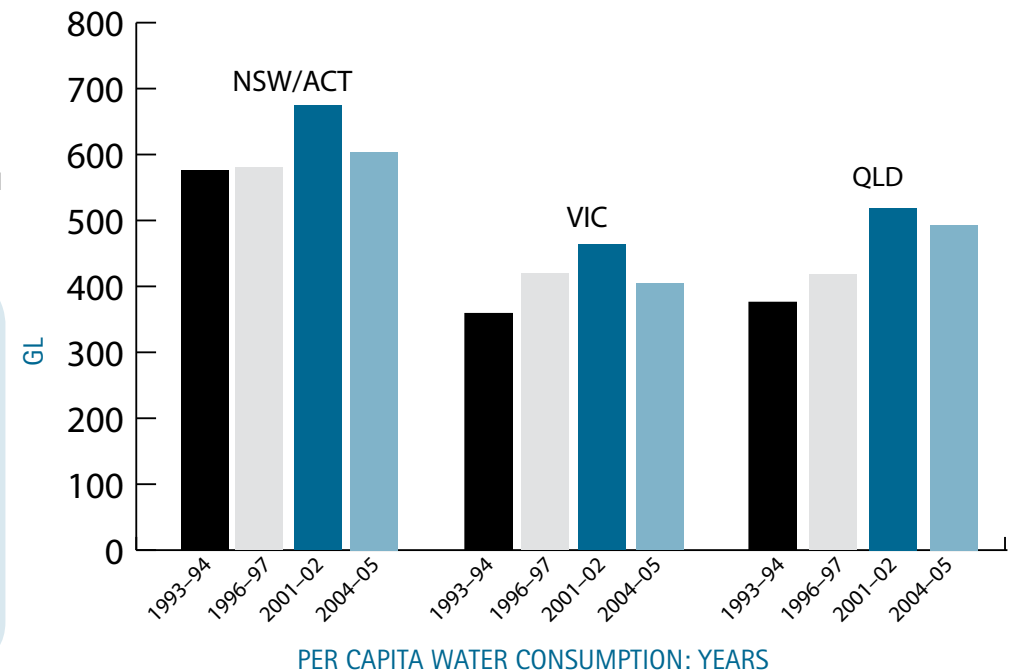
the water-consumption figures are 18–62% higher than average.⁶

This higher rate of consumption can be illustrated as follows. A four-person household might use 20 L filling the sink to wash up after a meal (the per-capita usage of water in this case is 5 L). A person living alone still needs to do the dishes. If roughly the same amount is used in a similarly sized sink, the amount used per person will be more than 5 L.

Figure 1. Changes in per-capita water consumption for each state and territory, 2000–01 to 2004–05

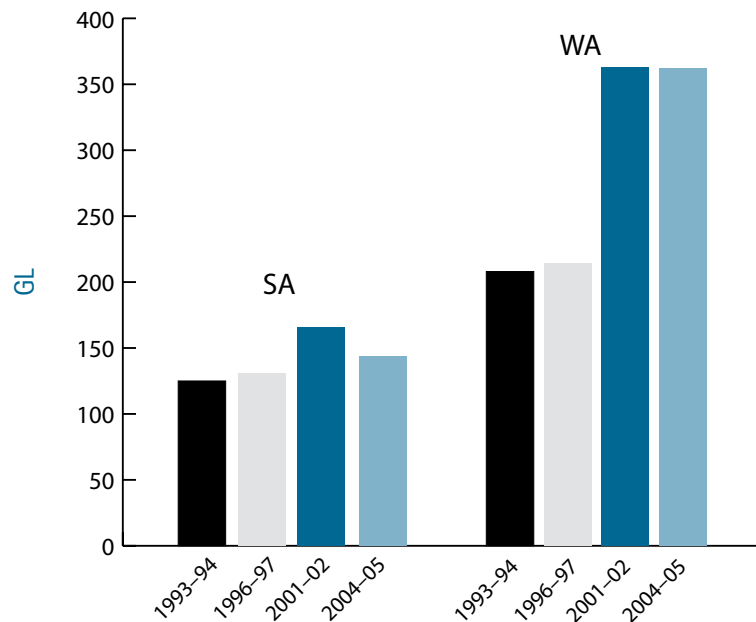
The graphs above and on the following page show the level of household water consumption state by state during four periods over a ten-year span: 1993–94, 1996–97, 2000–01 and 2004–05.

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Water account, Australia, 1993–94 to 1996–97*, ABS, cat. no. 4610.0, Canberra, 2000, <www.abs.gov.au>; and Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Water account for Australia, 2004–2005*, ABS, cat. no. 4610.0, Canberra, 2006, <www.abs.gov.au>.

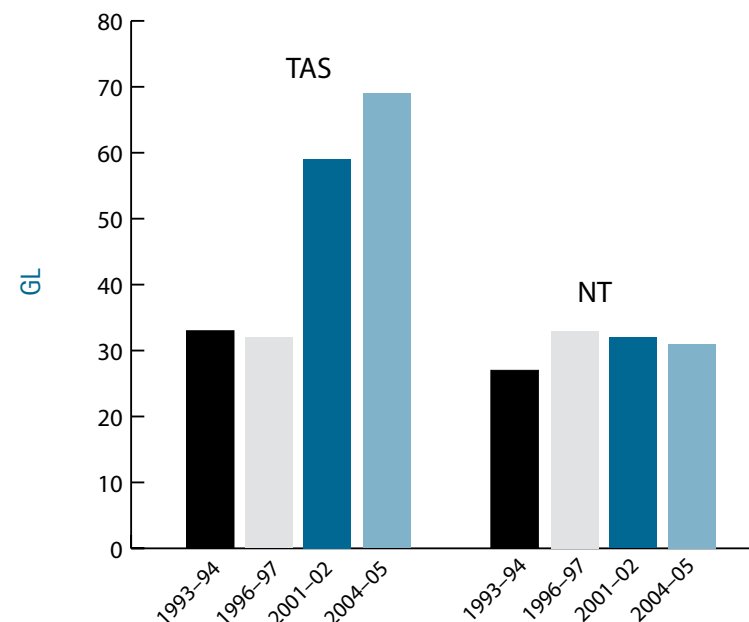




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PER CAPITA WATER CONSUMPTION: YEARS



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▶ REFERENCES

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Water account, Australia, 2004-2005*, ABS, Canberra, 2006.
2. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Environmental outlook*, OECD Environment Directorate, Paris, 2001, pp. 97-102.
3. Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council, *Recycling water for our cities*, DEST, Canberra, 2003, p. 2.
4. C Houston, 'Melbourne's energy guzzlers still living the high life', the *Age*, 23 December 2006, p. 4.
5. *ibid.*, p. 4.
6. R Birrell, V Rapson, & TF Smith, *Impact of demographic change and urban consolidation on domestic water use*, Water Services Association of Australia - Occasional paper no. 15, Monash University Melbourne, 2005, p. 5.

Some other useful sources

- Australian Government Department of the Environment and Water Resources. All government initiatives related to water can be accessed here such as water efficiency labelling, community water grants, and water reform and resources information, <www.environment.gov.au>.