



# the motivation to act

“ In our everyday lives, a flashing amber light usually puts us in alert mode. If ever we needed a signal to become more involved in water and take actions to secure our water future, then surely this is it ... ”

*But in order to move through the danger to seize the opportunity, we have first to recognize that we are in fact facing a crisis. So why is it that our leaders seem not to hear such clarion warnings? Are they resisting the truth because they know that the moment they acknowledge it, they will face a moral imperative to act? Is it simply more convenient to ignore the warnings?*

*Perhaps, but inconvenient truths do not go away just because they are not seen. Indeed, when they are not responded to, their significance doesn't diminish, it grows.*

Al Gore, *Vanity Fair*, May 2006, p. 107

The current water crisis in Australia is very serious. It's not just serious for farmers, but for all of us. Sam Lake and Nick Bond cogently outlined three possible water scenarios in their recent paper 'Australian futures: freshwater ecosystems and human water useage'.<sup>1</sup>

A 'business-as usual' scenario is where we continue our present farming practices, mining and manufacturing processes and urban domestic consumption patterns. We wait for the drought to break, ignore the environmental damage to our land and water and simply treat and restore a few iconic sites. In truth, this is a recipe for disaster.

Equally problematic is the 'Bathroom, anyone?' scenario (see box on this page) in which we attempt to accelerate economic growth, ramp up water extraction and give away any chance of carrying out the necessary repair and restoration of our land and water systems.

Our best chance is to embrace a sustainability scenario: not simply to cope with existing pressures but to position ourselves with

respect to climate change. This will require us, as a matter of urgency, to initiate major improvements in water efficiency in every aspect of life in our society and set in train processes for environmental repair.

Now is the time when we need to see articulated a national goal for water reform, to which all Australians can aspire, as well as clear pathways for taking action on water that will help secure our future in this country. The sections that follow are devoted to precisely this task.

## ▶ REFERENCES

PS Lake & NR Bond, 'Australian Futures: Freshwater Ecosystems and Human Water Useage', *Futures*, vol. 39, 2007, pp. 288-305.

We find it almost impossible to imagine the End of Us. But then so did the Mayans, one imagines. Or even the Romans, with their milder catastrophe. Perhaps in the midst of the decline there were speeches in the Forum about what great shape the franchise was in. A little unrest with the Christians, a bit of bother with the barbarians, but nothing the empire couldn't deal with by 'growing the business.' Bathroom, anyone?

F Souter, 'Buy now pay later', *the Age Good Weekend*, 10 June 2006, pp. 40-1

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Several Watermark project champions, project launch, Federation Square, Melbourne, 22 March 2005. (From left: Frank Ryan, Lynne Haultain, Tracy Bartram, Dur-e Dara, Glen Manton.)

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