

PART TWO *the way forward*

20 principles

guiding water reform

The following 20 principles will help us meet our serious water challenges by securing agreement on actions, ranking priorities, and working for the common good. These principles were derived by the *Watermark Australia* team using as a basis the discussions and reports from all the *Watermark* groups, as well as a specific workshop with several of the scientists who gave their time to the project. We also drew on a statement of community principles contained in the Purple Sage Project, led by the Victorian Women's Trust.

THE FUNDAMENTALS

Worldwide, the availability of clean fresh water is diminishing while the global population grows and the Earth appears to be entering a period of significant climate change. We are everything with water – and nothing without it. Water is not a resource for the privileged few. Nor should it cause social division. We need to accord a special status to water which is maintained across generations.

1 Access to clean fresh water is a fundamental human right.

2 Water has an intrinsic value to humanity and all living things irrespective of commercial considerations.

This fundamental value must be safeguarded by our political, social and economic institutions.

3 Our fresh water is a common good, shared by all, and held in public trust by governments.

4 Creating the conditions that ensure access to water to meet the essential needs of every person, every community and all living things is an obligation on society as a whole.

In meeting these essential needs, public health must always be protected; and social cohesion, rather than polarity, should be nurtured and maintained.

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KNOWLEDGE TO GUIDE ACTION

Modern societies have created new and special pressures on Earth's finite water resources. Their future depends on achieving sustainable water use. Such recognition needs to occur at all levels of government and their agencies, in businesses and across wider communities. Responses need to be inclusive of people and based on sound knowledge and accurate information.

6 The decisions that need to be made about water **have to be taken right now by us, at this moment in time**, and not left to some future generation.

All people should have the opportunity to **participate in the debates and decisions about water** that will affect their lives and livelihoods.

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8 Rural and urban Australians are tightly connected by the water that is used to produce our food and fibre. **The responsibility for reaching sustainable water use, and the investment that will be required, is a shared one.**

We should seek to understand the land in which we live and appreciate its variability, limits, ecological processes and their timelines.

9 **Improving and extending our water literacy is an essential step towards achieving a sustainable water future.**



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With European settlement, many of our cities and towns were located along waterways. Water was supplied easily to these emerging population centres, as well as servicing the needs of agriculture and industry. At the same time, these waterways were used to dispose of our domestic and agricultural waste. Other towns and farming regions, however, grew by drawing on our groundwater resources, originally thought to be limitless.

Steadily, there has been a shift in the community perception of waterways, from what we might call a utilitarian view, to one that is more holistic – seeing waterways as natural living systems, essential for healthy catchments, and supporting a range of flora and fauna. We now know that waterways and aquifer systems are linked, and that groundwater resources, accumulated over millennia, are not inexhaustible. In many locations groundwater is being used at rates in excess of the natural recharge.

10 To remain **living things**, our rivers and streams **need to get the first drink**. Once this need is satisfied, water can be allocated for other purposes.

11 We should always respect **the linkages between surface water and groundwater**, ensuring that neither is wasted or contaminated.

We should seek to **reuse water as many times as possible**. At the same time, we should aim to **minimise adverse environmental impacts and maximise the social and economic gains from its use**.

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GOVERNMENTS' ROLE

Governments have a central role in guiding the economy, mediating competing interests and enhancing society in relation to water management. Decisions about water are likely to affect everyone to a varying degree. These decisions and proposed actions must be informed, considerate of the common good and of intergenerational impacts.

13 Governments have a particular and enduring responsibility to provide wise stewardship of the nation's water resources.

14 Governments in a market economy have an enduring responsibility to act as a balance to market forces in the management of our water resources.

15 Governments should act as committed and independent regulators of water use, taking into account urgency, social impact, fairness and community expectations.

16 Governments have a responsibility to measure, monitor and report regularly on how water is being consumed and by whom, how the environment is being provided for and how communities are moving towards the sustainable use of water.

National and state government programs on water reform must be underpinned by appropriate public inquiry and consultation as well as being transparent, technically sound and socially and economically responsible.

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WHAT IT WILL TAKE

Australia's dire water situation requires concerted, long-term national responses. We should understand and accept the need for significant investment and expenditure, to be shared equitably. There will be individual costs as well. These investments should be seen as a stake in our future, to ensure a quality of life that is shared, safe, secure and aesthetically pleasing. Rapid uptake of existing and new technologies will be central to many of these actions.

18 We need to accept and **share the significant medium-term financial costs** that will be required to achieve wise and efficient water use.

19 All sectors of society should be prepared to rapidly adopt **appropriate, proven, water-saving technologies and actively support further innovation.**

20 Each of us has a responsibility to leave society and our environment in better shape than we found it.