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78.3 ABC

**Alice Springs Morning Show**

**Monday, 31 October 2005**

**9:30 AM**

**Compere: Kate Sieper**

**Interviewees: Patrick Dupont,**

**Compere**

Do we need to drink more beer? It might be one answer to Alice Springs' limited water supply, unfortunately though, as most of our water goes on our gardens, even if plants liked beer, I think most people would probably bawk at pouring hundreds and hundreds of litres of beer onto the lawn, although we're happy enough to do it when it is H2O. So if we can't drown our sorrows, what do we do about our dwindling water supply? The Territory Government wants you to have your say on how our water is used, and on the weekend, a public forum was held on the issue, although, I have to tell you, only a handful of people turned up, and I spoke with a couple of them.

**Patrick Dupont**

Oh hi, it's Patrick Dupont here and we're looking at a line on the ground, oh I should say first up, we're doing some community consultation for the Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy, and there is a line running across the room – it's a masking tape line on the carpet, and at reasonably equal points along the line we have different definitions of allowable yield which means how much water we should be allowed to take out of the aquifers to us in Alice Springs, and I'm now standing where I feel reasonably comfortable, which is that the allowable yield allows for twenty percent of the resource to be used in a hundred years, which actually equates to eighty percent of the resource in four hundred years. That is basically using each year, about one point three times what we use now.

So not that much more than what we're using now. So I think that that's a reasonable place to stand. I think that that's saying, you know, our current level of water use is probably very inefficient in lots of ways and so I think that that is attainable.

**Compere**

It doesn't give us a great deal of room for development?

**Patrick Dupont**

Maybe not a huge amount of development using extremely good quality water, but there is, as has been pointed out today already, a lot of lesser quality water that would be suitable for agricultural use, so yeah, I think we save the good quality water for drinking water.

**Compere**

What are some of the other options on the line?

**Patrick Dupont**

Okay, what else have we got? We've got this one here, which is the next one along, so eighty percent of the resource to be used in two hundred and ninety years. So that gives us a bit more room to move. That's almost double the current use. It's one point eight times the current use, and two hundred and ninety years to me seems like quite a long time and I don't have any problems with that as an option.

**Compere**

Do you think in talking about four hundred years, two hundred and ninety years, setting these markers in place that limit our water so far out, when we don't know what technological advances there'll be; what kind of industry demands there'll be; what kind of population demands there really will be in fifty years, much less in a hundred?

**Patrick Dupont**

No I think that's taking a very conservative, sensible approach. I think it's applying the precautionary principle.

We don't know what's going to be happening in the future; that's true, but that's all the more reason to be careful now, and keep our options open.

**Compere**

So at the moment we're standing kind of in the middle of the line?

**Patrick Dupont**

Did you want to have a look at the extremes in this line in front of us?

**Compere**

Yeah.

**Patrick Dupont**

We'll go right there. This one here is – okay, allowable yield allows for a hundred percent of the resource to be used in one hundred years. Now that doesn't make clear what would happen in a hundred and one years, but as the point was made earlier, it wouldn't necessarily get to that point because we'd be reassessing the water use every five years or every ten years, anyway, yeah, but this is the end of the spectrum. It's using up all the resource in one hundred years, and there's no where further that we can go here in terms of our current policy of water allocation.

**Compere**

Sure, but even if you did decide to stand at this part of the line and say we will allow a hundred percent of the resource to be used in a hundred years, at the moment we're not using anything like that, so it's just saying it's allowable, but – but it's currently not happening, and it wouldn't happen unless some big project came along and therefore we said well it is allowable, there is water there? If you stood down this end of the line, didn't mean – doesn't actually mean there'd be no water?

**Patrick Dupont**

No that's right, but I think – and as some people have

raised the issue today, what would happen if say they discovered lot's of uranium close to town and they decided to have another dam like Olympic Dam that uses tremendous amounts of water, in a years time we have a massive mine, we have a massive horticulture development and we decide we're going to use up all the resource because it's at present unallocated and therefore you know, it's being wasted, it's not being used, then that could, under this policy, be allowable.

**Compere**

Let's have a look at the other end of the line. What have you got here?

**Patrick Dupont**

Okay. A sustainable yield allows the aquifer to be used forever, so that is true sustainability I think – a lot of people's definitions, and what we would have to do is we would have to use point one three of our current use to allow that. So really our present day uses in Alice Springs have far surpassed what is the sustainable yield by this definition, and that would be certainly possible. I heard someone on the radio the other day talking about fifty litres a day of water use, and I thought wow, that's pretty impressive. That's not much water at all, but really, that would be very hard. It would be an interesting exercise to look at what we could do to achieve true sustainability, and it would certainly be a good education exercise I think for people to see how far away from true sustainability we are.

**Interviewee One**

Gidday, my name is Emily and I'm here today at the Alice Springs Water Use Strategy meeting and we've been asked to make a decision, or make a statement about where we think the sustainable yield should be for the Alice Springs water in the future. There's been various

proposals put forward in the plan, and I've decided that I think a reasonable yield allowance would be no more than eighty percent of current use, and that – they're predicting that this would help the Alice Springs water resource to last for six hundred and seventy two years, and I think that current water usage could be a lot more efficient, a lot – and people could make a lot more water saving if they used water much more wisely. It's a small sacrifice to make.

**Compere**

Do you think that inhibits development or even the smallest amount of population growth?

**Interviewee Two**

Potentially, it possibly does, and that's something that's come out when other's have spoken about the need to increase population and to increase industry and to increase opportunities for development in Alice Springs and I guess I'm thinking of my personal feelings purely about how I think it'd be easy to save a little bit more water, all of us individuals in our households were making a small change, so that's why I decided to go with this one.

**Compere**

Would there be anything that would make you shift on this line?

**Interviewee Two**

Possibly. I think – I think I'd like to think about people speaking about possible new technologies coming on board that would help to use water more efficiently, that would help extract water more efficiently. Maybe those things would make me influence – influence the way I feel about how we could use water, yep.

**Compere**

Okay, so now we're up to the uses section. Can you

explain what we're looking at here?

**Patrick Dupont**

Yeah, what we're doing is we're trying to allocate levels of importance to the various different beneficial uses and I can see from looking at the board, everyone thinks environmental use is high importance; cultural use is actually pretty high importance; public water supply as well, but then when we get to agricultural, industrial and rural and stock and aquaculture, people are a little bit more unsure in their sort of ranging between medium importance, low importance and shouldn't be considered, and it is a bit of a tricky one because the beneficial uses as they're defined, incorporates some conflicting ideas. For example, cultural use includes waterholes that have important cultural, spiritual significance for Aboriginal people, but it also includes potentially a ski lake, and you may not feel the same way about both of those things.

**Compere**

Also, when it comes to beneficial use, I mean it's either in or out, so if you say that agriculture is low importance to you, that's still presumably saying it should be in?

**Patrick Dupont**

Yeah, that's right, and the only one that's got lot's of shouldn't be considered is aquaculture, but I guess, like from my perspective, I think aquaculture could be considered if you were talking about using native species such as Red Claw and you were growing them in such a way where you weren't using lots and lots of water or energy or what ever, but then if you're looking at tuna farms in the desert, you're probably – that probably shouldn't be considered, so it's a difficult one.

**Compere**

Hi, did you find this section difficult?

What, water is used for what thing currently would have been like a base line information so you could make a decision, but I just basically put – I didn't put dots in everything, I put dots – which is my voting system, high importance for the environmental uses including water to maintain the health of independent eco systems. I've also put dots in cultural use, which is to provide water to meet traditional cultural needs as well as aesthetic and recreational needs, and public water supply, because obviously people need to drink water and use it for their own domestic use.

**Compere**

Why didn't you put any dots in then for agriculture or rural stock and -

**Interviewee Three**

I guess I really did that because I didn't think I knew enough about making a valid or informed decision, but if I was going to put it in at this stage from my understanding, I probably would put a lower – lower importance of those things. The agriculture, industrial, rural stock and domestic and aquaculture.

**Compere**

Would you rule something out? Because I mean this is another way of controlling the use of the aquifers? I mean if you had said previously it was fine to use twenty percent of the aquifer for over the next one hundred years, and there's nothing but public water supply for instance, coming out of that, well you really are – I mean you wouldn't even reach that, so controlling the water on a couple of fronts?

**Interviewee Four**

I agree with a conversation that's been going around at the moment about agricultural use and the benefits of agriculture for local Alice Springs consumption, to reduce

that ecological foot print, versus agricultural for development and exporting produce around, because that doesn't really benefit Alice economically, but I think that ecological foot print thing though, I hadn't considered that before, but that's been discussed around here and I agree with that. I was a bit confused earlier about industrial use in terms of tourism, because I think tourism's the biggest industry in Central Australia and other industries are based on human industry, health and those other things, I think they all fit under the public water supply, tourism is considered under that rather than industrial. So, yeah, I probably wouldn't put industrial as a very high use.

**Compere**

How have you found this whole process? Do you feel that you have clearly been able to express your feelings and that you'll be listened to?

**Interviewee Four**

I think that this is a really great way to – for community people to be involved in the decision making process. I think it's very often that we – that community members complain when something's happened and they don't agree with it and don't always have opportunities to making their opinions heard, so I think everyone should participate in these types of things, if it's available to them.

**Compere**

Not a huge turn out though?

**Interviewee Four**

I think that this needs to be taken into consideration, that it's only a small amount of actual complete community engagement – community involvement. There's lots of other ways that these strategies being put out to the community, so there's the line opportunity, and they've gone out for comment to different industries and different

groups. So I think this particular workshop is only one of the small indication of people giving their thoughts, so I think that it would be unfair to judge that – everybody's interest, based on today.

**Compere**

That was me, speaking at the last community consultation for a while. Thank you to Patrick there for having a chat to me. If you'd like to make a comment, take a look at [www.alicewaterplan.gov.au](http://www.alicewaterplan.gov.au) – that's [alicewaterplan.gov.au](http://alicewaterplan.gov.au).

**ENDS**

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