

Alice Springs

Water Resource Strategy 2005

Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy Steering Committee
Meeting #1 Beneficial Uses
Thursday 3rd November 2005

Attendees:

Murray Stewart (ASTC), Vin Lange (NT Horticultural Partnership Group), John Brisbin (ALEC), Don McDonald (NT Chamber of Commerce & Industry), Alan Whyte (PWC), Mark Stafford Smith (DK CRC), Patrick Dupont (CLC), Jonathan Vea (NRETA), John Childs (NRETA)

Facilitators: Michelle Rodrigo, Robbie Henderson

Intended Outcomes of Meeting – “At the completion of this meeting participants will...”

- Clearly understand how suggestions made in the consultation process will inform decision making and the final ASWRS plan.
- Clearly understand the role of beneficial uses in water allocation planning, policy and legislation.
- Clearly understand the definition of each beneficial use category.
- Critically discuss the beneficial uses for water resources in the Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy
- Recommend beneficial uses for water resources in the Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy

1. Introduction to the Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy (ASWRS) – Jonathan Vea

Jonathan presented an overview of the ASWRS, highlighting its role as a regulatory document under the NT Water Act and the mechanisms by which it operates. The process of community involvement in strategy development was discussed.

2. Steering Committee Terms of Reference – John Childs

John presented an overview of the role of steering committee meetings, the terms of reference and explained how input from the steering committee can influence the planning process and final strategy.

3. Meeting ground-rules and intended outcomes – Michelle Rodrigo

Michelle Rodrigo presented the principles of community consultation committed to by NRETA Policy and Planning unit (see appendices # 1). Participants were asked to offer further ‘ground rules’ for working together and suggested ‘active seeking of views from everyone.’

Michelle Rodrigo presented the Beneficial Uses meeting outcomes desired by the NRETA Policy and Planning unit (see above). Participants were asked if they had any further expectations from the meeting that could be added to the meeting outcomes. The following suggestions were added:

- Develop a better understanding of the link between Beneficial Uses and Water Allocation
- Develop a better understanding of the relevance of Beneficial Uses to Alice Springs



4. Explanation of beneficial uses – John Childs

John Childs explained the definition of beneficial uses under the Water Act and provided examples of beneficial uses in application including the relationship between beneficial uses and water allocation. The explanation was followed by a number of questions.

5. Brainstorm Beneficial uses – Michelle Rodrigo

Participants formed two groups and were asked to consider current and future uses for water in Alice Springs by completing the statement: “*water from the Amadeus rock aquifers should be available for...*” Answers were brief and specific (eg. *watering gardens*).

Uses were written on paper and sorted under Beneficial Use categories. Participants were invited to place a red dot on uses that they did not believe were ‘beneficial’ (these represent the views of individuals and not necessarily the whole group). The results of the activity were as follows:

Public Water Supply	Agricultural	Industrial
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaporative coolers - Health & hygiene - Car wash (commercial) - Car wash (domestic) ● - Household domestic use - Park / garden irrigation ● - Swimming pools - Aesthetic Waterfalls (e.g. Peter Kittle) - Tourism – accommodation - Sterilizing - medical needs - Pets - Sewerage (transport of wastes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local horticulture – dates, grapes etc. - Feedlots - Tree farming ● - Lucerne / hay - Forestry - Rice ● - Cotton ● - Aboriginal horticulture - Non-aboriginal horticulture - Horticulture for local markets - Horticulture for local export 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Irrigation of sporting fields & parks (Town Basin water) - Water bottling for selling - Golf courses - Watering the tip - Pollution dilution - Fruit processing ● - Industrial processes - Mine operations ● - Building / manufacturing ● - Road cleaning - Native animal reserve / zoo - Heating / cooling heat sink

Environmental	Cultural	Rural Stock & Domestic	Aquaculture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Waterholes - Maintain river flows - Groundwater dependant ecosystems (eg River Red Gums) - Environmental flows – avoid salinisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recreational lake ● - Preserving sacred sites eg. waterholes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pastoral – cattle drinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inland aquaculture (Redclaw) ●



6. General Discussion – Beneficial Uses

Vin Lange suggested that participants needed more time to explore issues around Beneficial Uses prior to being able to make decisions or recommendations on Beneficial Use declarations. It was agreed that an 'around the table' dialogue would occur where all participants could state their opinion, view or position. It was acknowledged that this process would delay coming to decisions / recommendations at this meeting and participants NRETA staff agreed that participants would be canvassed for further input between meetings.

The following is an overview of discussions between steering committee members:

Vin Lange (NT Horticultural Partnership Group)

- Approving or not approving a proposal to use water should require a business plan demonstrating sustainability, rather than a potentially arbitrary allocation decision on broad beneficial use categories.
- For example if high-value crops (e.g. winter tomatoes) using small quantities of good quality water are demonstrated to have social benefits (e.g. indigenous employment at Amoonguna) then there should be no impediment to that use.
- Some of the ground water bodies should clearly not be used for large-scale horticultural extraction.
- Other groundwater bodies of the great potential for development, especially for indigenous peoples.
- Federal Government reforms to welfare may require more Aboriginal people to seek work and it's important that there are opportunities.

Murray Stewart (ASTC)

- A proposal for a nonpreferred water use (e.g. industrial) should take into account potential community benefits.
- We should take care and be mindful of limiting growth of industry and economic opportunities.
- The community itself must adhere to best practices.

John Brisbin (ALEC):

- Uncomfortable with categories for Beneficial Uses, would like to encourage flexibility for innovation and good ideas.
- Should require use of the lowest quality water available, for any proposed purpose.
- Suggests declare all beneficial uses for each groundwater source (aquifer).
- Then test each proposal for water use for acceptable social and economic outcomes, on a case-by-case basis using precautionary principles.
- Conservative (best practice) use of water to be a requirement for all such proposals.
- Must encourage opportunities for enterprise integration using (and potentially reusing) a variety of water qualities.

Don McDonald (NT Chamber of Commerce & Industry):

- Supports the idea of requiring a business case for development where water will be used.
- Any business case should be required to assume different intrinsic values for the different water qualities.



Alan White(PWC):

- Power and Water Corporation maintains that any water less than 1000 mg/L should be reserved exclusively for potable use.
- Noted that Department of Health says that less than 800 mg/L is the limit of acceptability.
- Horticulture should use only water is greater than 1000 mg/L, with desalination if necessary.
- Public expectation of water quality is a key to Public Water Supply. This expectation is not yet defined / quantified. Perhaps hardness should be the driver rather than TDS.
- PowerWater Corporation would like reuse of effluent mentioned in the strategy.
- Agrees with Glenn Marshall, that food grown for local markets should take priority over exports.
- Economic connection – how much are you prepared to pay? E.g. Yulara pay a premium on the tariff to undertake reverse osmosis and it's viable for them to do this. It should be the same for horticulture, they can access poorer quality water if they are prepared to pay for further water treatment.
- Aquaculture should be excluded.

Mark Stafford Smith (DK CRC):

- Need to balance potable use with uses which sustain livelihoods -- to maintain a reason for people to live in Alice Springs.
- Need to forecast rates of water use -- the volumes of better quality water need to be tested against growth rates.
- Sees the process of beneficial use determination primarily as one of eliminating any unacceptable uses.
- Must establish criteria for critical reviews/assessment of proposed new uses. For example, lower standards of justification may be required for renewable resources (alluvial aquifers) and/or for poorer quality waters.
- Need to look at how rigorous assessment can be applied to new licences, especially for good quality water.
- Need to establish the rules for trading entitlements *between* different Beneficial Use categories.
- Establish whether there are any impediments (eg, competition-laws) to allowing market-driven trade within a particular beneficial use, but requiring Water Advisory Committee approval for trade between beneficial uses, on the basis of a business case.

7. Meeting Conclusion – Next Steps

It was agreed that further meetings will start earlier at 2.30pm and conclude on time at 5.00pm. It was noted that Ald. Murray Stewart (ASTC) will not be able to attend meetings until 3.10pm.

Robbie Henderson will distribute feedback sheets regarding Beneficial Uses for the Amadeus Rock aquifers (good and fair/poor water quality). Participants agreed to respond to feedback sheets by;

- a) Filling out the Beneficial Use tables; *and/or*
- b) Writing detailed qualitative comments about Beneficial Uses

Jonathan Vea distributed background reading material relating to next weeks Steering Committee meeting that will be focused on maximum allowable limits to water extraction over 100 years, and water allocation.

The meeting concluded at 5.30pm.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday 10th November 2005, 2.30pm - 5.00pm NRETA conference room



Northern Territory Government

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts

Appendices #1

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles of community consultation were agreed to by the NRETA Policy and Planning unit:

- Consultation will be transparent.
- We will maintain openness and take new ideas on board
- We will ensure respect for the diverse range of interests that may be represented
- We will make reasonable attempts to resolve conflicts, if they arise, and reach a suitable solution
- Information relating to the consultation can be accessed easily by everyone involved
- Participants will receive feedback about inputs received and how the final decision was reached
- If a difference occurs between the input and the final decision the reasons for this will be clearly documented
- We will actively seek the views from all group members