

Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy 2005

Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy Steering Committee Meeting # 2 “Allowable Yield and Water Allocation” Thursday 10th 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), Patrick Dupont (CLC), Jonathan Vea (NRETA),

By teleconference: Mark Stafford Smith (DKA CRC), John Childs (NRETA)

Facilitators: Michelle Rodrigo, Robbie Henderson

1. Intended Outcomes of Meetings

Outcomes / aims of the first three steering committee meetings have been adapted to participants' expectations and reflect the adaptive approach of the NRETA policy and planning team. Participants were asked to rank the outcomes between 1 -10, where 1 is not at all achieved and 10 is completely achieved (as from the start of meeting # 2). The group did not rank outcomes that haven't been part of previous meetings and are on the forward agenda. (See appendices # 1 for Outcomes and rankings)

2. Review of discussions / feedback since last weeks meeting

Since last meeting there has been a lot of water strategy 'traffic' – email comments/suggestions, clarifying statements from NRETA, Beneficial Uses tables submitted, informal meetings of some members of group. Participants were asked to present to the group the key points/suggestions that they had made during the week. The following is a summary of points:

Discussion on Beneficial Uses:

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| John Brisbin ALEC | - How much flexibility do we have in terms of changing beneficial uses? |
| Mark Stafford Smith
CSIRO | - Is there scope for new more practical definitions of Beneficial Uses? |
| Patrick Dupont CLC
Alan Whyte PWC | - Power and water have stated their position of having all of the water < 1000 mg/l TDS allocated for Public Water Supply (Alan Whyte), does Power and Water Corporation need all of this water? (Patrick Dupont) – Response (Alan Whyte): the answer would require a lengthy discussion, PWC have articulated their position in writing and can provide it to the group (see PWC document attached to this report). |
| Vin Lange NT
Horticultural
Partnership Group | - Satisfied with the level of discussion and answering of questions during the week |
| John Childs NRETA | - NRETA could draw up geographic zones that reflect water quality – but there are some difficulties with assumptions and over simplifying the nature of the resource |

Recommendations:

NRETA draft Beneficial Uses for further discussion at the next meeting. Steering committee members may provide further qualitative and / or quantitative feedback on the electronic forms distributed (by COB Wednesday 16th November).



Discussion on Water Trading:

- Don McDonald
Chamber of
Commerce
- Not sure if there is an issue that we should be worried about with trading or not. What are the current commitments / expectations for water? We seem to be only drawing out a miniscule amount of water currently
- Mark Stafford Smith
CSIRO
- A summary of points were brought forward by Mark Stafford Smith through email discussions with Ian Smith (Director Policy & Planning NRETA)
 - Discussions suggested that;
 1. There should be no inter-basin trading or between defined zones within a basin e.g. high or low quality water;
 2. That trading is currently not that likely, but thought should be put into principles of trade between Beneficial Uses now;
 3. There is little in the current ASWRS draft about water trading, but it can be developed over time, acknowledged that it doesn't have to be perfect at this stage.
- John Brisbin ALEC
- Good basic principles should be developed for trade, such as trigger mechanisms that would require proposals to be subject to a higher level of review. Doesn't need detail now, but commitment to general principles
- John Brisbin ALEC
- Don't have enough background on trading – there is not much about it in the current draft ASWRS. It's a dark spot – how does licensing work?
- Vin Lange NT
Horticultural
Partnership Group
- Suggest that NRETA draw up some proposals – present a 'line in the sand' so that the steering committee can see how licences / trading could manifest itself
- Murray Stewart
Alice Springs Town
Council
- Need to have more information and practical examples on how it would work (trading), how will it affect the overall plan? Information about trading should be widely circulated, especially to industry to ensure that they can have some input for agreement and compliance. Need to balance water preservation with commercial needs. Don't want to commit opinions to paper until I completely understand trading
- John Brisbin ALEC
- Water trading is more relevant if maximum allowable yield is lower, then we would need to come back to trading

Recommendations:

NRETA planning team draft guidelines for water trading including examples of practical application. These will be distributed and discussed at the next meeting



Discussion on Maximum Allowable Yield:

- John Brisbin ALEC - Are we (steering committee) going to recommend maximum allowable yield? (John Brisbin)
Response(Jonathan Vea): yes

The following discussion involves participants 'reporting back' on an informal meeting during the week (involving John Brisbin, Vin Lange, Alan Whyte, Alan Cooney)

- John Brisbin ALEC - The meeting involved tossing around the real requirements for horticulture for the foreseeable future. There was some consensus – we did not want to see the 80 /20 rule as policy or having a large proportion of water 'unallocated.' We thought that a maximum allowable yield around the range of 20 -30% in 100 years was more appropriate. A basic consensus was that water should be approved on merit and principle and this needs to be translated into the language of the plan such as allocations licences etc. (John Brisbin)
- Vin Lange NT Horticultural Partnership Group - With this suggestion 20 -30% in 100 years the water would last around 400 years – isn't this more responsible? It would see trading occur sooner, which is not such a bad thing
- Alan Whyte PWC - Uncertain about the 30 / 100 maximum allowable yield, but agree on general principles of 20 -30% in 100 years. This could force PWC to trade with horticulturalists – need to explore further. PWC still has the position that 100% of water <1000 mg/l TDS should be preserved for public water supply. See attached document from PWC.
- John Brisbin ALEC - We all agree that the 80/20 rule policy for maximum sustainable yield is not acceptable
- Mark Stafford Smith CSIRO - Constraining use at an early stage leads more to innovation and far better long term outcomes. Comparison with worldwide approaches to water / sustainability – the current maximum yield is generous. Short term pain could promote a longer term planning environment where best practice is pursued.
- John Brisbin ALEC - Can maximum allowable yield be applied differently to different zones or aquifers?
Response (John Childs): Conceptually – yes
- Mark Stafford Smith CSIRO - Not sure if there is a rationale for having different maximum allowable yield for different aquifers. More credible if it were the same for each one, except if they operate dramatically differently.
- Vin Lange NT Horticultural Partnership Group - We will know more when we start drawing out water, we will have a better understanding after 5 years and then we could review **Response** (Jonathan Vea): experience elsewhere in Australia suggest that it is very difficult to 'wind back' allocations.
- Mark Stafford Smith CSIRO - Better to start conservatively and work up rather than having to wind back
- Vin Lange NT Horticultural Partnership Group - Recognise that we have a clean slate to work with now and an opportunity to avoid the same problems of the Murray Darling basin – this is prudent.



Discussion on finding a consensus for Maximum Allowable Yield:

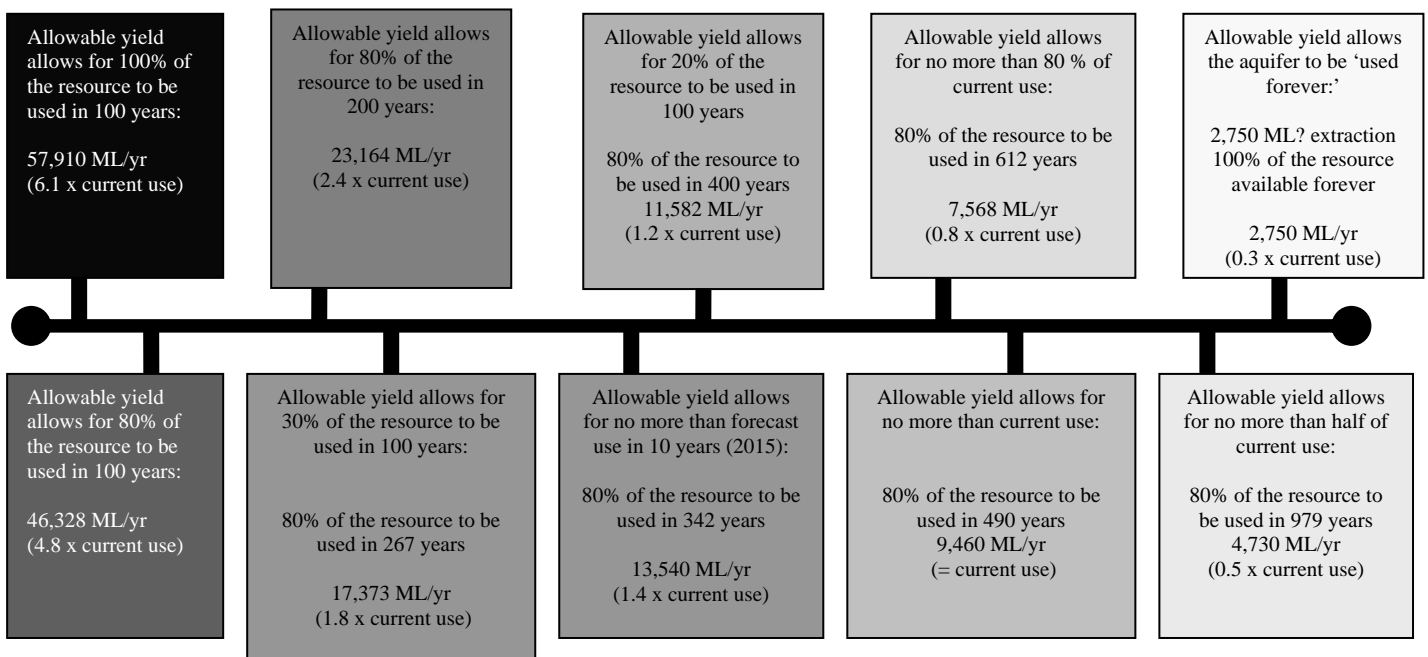
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| Mark Stafford Smith
CSIRO | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Supportive of a more conservative approach to maximum allowable yield- would encourage monitoring progress, with the possibility that more water could be used in the future. Conservative approach encourages best practice. |
| Patrick Dupont CLC | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Supportive of a more conservative approach to maximum allowable yield- Not enough is known about possible impacts to groundwater dependant ecosystems or cultural sites. Encourages the precautionary principle. |
| Alan Whyte PWC | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Supportive of a more conservative approach to maximum allowable yield- uses should be subject to critical review to ensure efficiency, including PWC use. |
| Vin Lange NT
Horticultural Partnership
Group | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 'Absolutely support conservative approach'- there should be no repeat of what happened on the Murray, caution that the term 'conservative' is subjective and peoples individual interpretation will differ. |
| Don McDonald
Chamber of Commerce | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Supportive of conservative approach- now is the time to do it. Having 'unallocated' water is questionable. |
| John Brisbin ALEC | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Supportive of conservative approach |
| Murray Stewart
Alice Springs Town
Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Did not commit to support or not support a conservative approach- Limits made should be made absolute and clear, not a general approach |



3. Maximum Allowable Yield

Jonathan Vea provided a brief presentation on current NRETA policy on Maximum Allowable Yield and figures about the nature of the regional water resources. Anthony Knapton (NRETA Natural Systems) was introduced to the steering committee members, members were invited to arrange to speak with Anthony at a suitable time for a more detailed explanation about how ‘aquifer storage volumes and recharge’ is estimated.

Robbie Henderson facilitated an activity called ‘Where do you stand.’ The activity was primarily for dialog and sharing ideas around scenarios for various options of maximum allowable yield. Participants chose to stand on at a position on the line that represents their view of where the maximum sustainable yield should be. The options are shown in the table (below).



Participants recorded their rationale for their position on Maximum Sustainable Yield on butcher’s paper: (Mark Stafford Smith was required to leave the meeting and is an apology for this exercise).

The first 3 members suggested a maximum allowable yield of 20% in 100 years

- John Brisbin: - 20% is applying precautionary principle, it equates to an increased use of 20% therefore is a compromise position
- Alan Whyte: - Ideally (maximum allowable yield) should stay at current use, but this is unrealistic – this option allows growth in the town but not allowing horticulture to have any water under 1000 mg/l TDS.
- Patrick Dupont: - Application of the precautionary principle to preserve groundwater dependant ecosystems and aboriginal cultural sites. I don’t think significantly increasing horticulture (with good quality water) is compatible with encouraging best practice water efficiency domestically.
- Vin Lange: - *Vin Lange’s preferred option for maximum sustainable yield was 30% in 100 years* Philosophy at ‘6.1’ (x current use), but recognises reality. Satisfy social / economic needs for township and indigenous people. Believe this is a reasonable use of the current resource which would then last over 330 years.



- Don McDonald: - *Don McDonald's preferred option for maximum sustainable yield was to cap use at 1.4 x current use or 80% in 342 years. Allows short term demands to be met, 10 years is a reasonable time to monitor impact on the resource. This option allows for prudent growth.*
- Murray Stewart: - *Murray did not choose a precise position, however made the following general comments regarding maximum allowable yield: There is a problem with population growth in cities, some people would like to see the town double in size – but where does this (water plan) fit in with population growth? What other processes / plans interact or overlap with this plan that may influence population? Would like to see links to other policies that also consider population growth.*

4. Conclusion

Participants briefly reflected on questions or issues arising from the meeting. John Brisbin (ALEC) raised the question / issue of the affects that pumping from a bore has on adjacent water resources. NRETA agreed to organise a response to this question.

The meeting concluded at 5.15pm.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday 17th November 2005, 2.30pm - 5.00pm NRETA (Alice Plaza) conference room

Recommendations:

The Steering Committee suggests a more conservative approach to defining a maximum allowable yield.

The Steering Committee suggests NRETA remove the large unallocated pool of water that exists as an artefact of the 80 /20 rule in the current planning framework



Appendices #1

“At the completion of steering committee meetings participants will...”

Understanding

- Understand how suggestions made in the consultation process will inform decision making and the final ASWRS plan
(Cmtee Rating 9/10)

- Understand the role of beneficial uses in water allocation planning, policy and legislation
(Cmtee Rating 9/10)

- Understand the definition of each beneficial use category
(Cmtee Rating 8/10)

Comment – understand but not necessarily agree. The categories are “too general”

Better understand the link between beneficial uses and allocation (Cmtee Rating 8/10)

- Understand the relevance of beneficial uses to Alice Springs
(Cmtee Rating 5/10)

Comment – what is the practical relevance, how important are BU’s?

- Understand the role of water entitlements, licensing and capacity for trading licences within the ASWRS
- Clearly understand the role of Water Allocation and Licensing in water management under the ASWRS

Critically Review

- Critically discuss the beneficial uses for water resources in the Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy
(Cmtee Rating 7/10)

Comment – Discussion not closed on this issue

- Critically discuss and form opinions on the *maximum allowable yield* for the Amadeus Rock aquifers

- Critically discuss the percentage allocations of water resources from the Amadeus Rock aquifers to beneficial uses

Provide Recommendations

- Provide Recommendations on beneficial uses for water resources in the Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy

- Provide ideas for general principles and guidelines that may advise the development of rules for water trading

- Provide Recommendations on the maximum allowable yield for the Amadeus Aquifers

- Provide Recommendations on the suitability of NRETA’s proposed water allocations to beneficial uses

