

The banner features a blue sky with white clouds over a brown, textured ground surface. The text 'Alice Springs' is in a dark blue font, and 'Water Resource Strategy 2005' is in a white font.

Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy 2005

Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy Steering Committee Meeting # 3 “Getting it together – BU’s, Water Allocation & Trading”

Thursday 17th November 2005

Attendees:

Murray Stewart (ASTC), Vin Lange (NT Horticultural Partnership Group), John Brisbin (ALEC), Alan Whyte (PWC), , Jonathan Vea (NRETA), John Childs (NRETA). By teleconference: Mark Stafford Smith (DK CRC),

Apologies: Patrick Dupont (CLC)

Facilitators: Michelle Rodrigo, Robbie Henderson

1. Endorsement of previous meeting reports

A motion was raised by Alan Whyte (PWC) to endorse the reports from meetings 1 & 2. Seconded by Vin Lange (NT Horticultural Partnership Group), the motion was accepted. Participants were also asked if they would give permission for meeting reports to be published on the internet; permission was provided by all present.

2. Establishing guiding principles

The group worked on setting in place some underlying principles in order to:

- Provide an underlying rationale for the decision and recommendations passed to the NRETA planning team.
- Give credibility to the final quantitative outcomes and policy directions
- Use as interim checkpoints to ensure the strategy is tracking in the right direction
- Capture the collective values of the steering committee regarding water use

Several draft ‘principles’ were presented to the steering committee, Michelle Rodrigo facilitated a small group brainstorm session to consider the drafts and further develop these principles. The following principles were proposed:

1. The needs of future generations should be considered and reflected through a conservative approach to water allocation
2. The strategy should encourage the advancement of best practice in water efficiency and the development of high value, creative and innovative uses for water
3. The strategy should take a triple bottom line approach to water management, balancing economic, social and environmental values
4. The strategy should be developed and managed through ongoing equitable and representative community participation, that maximises local determination
5. Adaptive management of the strategy should be encouraged through reflective learning, improved knowledge and accumulated experience

3. Review of proposed water trading guidelines

An email containing draft licence and trading guidelines was circulated by Jonathan Vea (NRETA) during the week. Jonathan tabled a summary of the proposal that highlighted the most significant guidelines that require further discussion. Participants were invited to ask questions or make comments and suggestions.

Discussion about proposed trading and licensing guidelines:

- | | |
|--|--|
| Mark Stafford Smith
DK CRC | - I will email comments on water trading to Jonathan Vea. <i>The comments will be circulated with this report.</i> |
| Vin Lange NT
Horticultural
Partnership Group | - The business plan requirements need to be taken further and demonstrate serious due diligence, currently it's too grey. Business plans need to consider a range of business principles. |
| Murray Stewart
ASTC | - Can see alarm bells for private enterprise, I think we can achieve all we need to achieve without involving people who are not real experts in business.
Government people won't be across their (water users) business
- Licensing needs simplification but can still meet the ultimate outcome
- Don't over regulate to avoid legal conflict |
| Vin Lange NT
Horticultural
Partnership Group | - Disagrees with Murray Stewart (ASTC)
- Business may not be experienced in this environment
- If developers don't have a good business plan then they shouldn't be doing it |
| Michelle Rodrigo
Facilitator | <i>In summary – we need to define what is meant by a business plan, perhaps we can find an agreed approach for business plans that does not have too much red tape or bureaucracy</i> |
| Alan Whyte PWC | - Paul Heaton (PWC) was vocal about guideline #5 (<i>Licences for which annual entitlements are not used within a reasonable period after issue will be reviewed and may be revoked in full or in part.</i>) Water trading trialled in southern states founded that licensees used up (wasted) all of their entitlement rather than not using it all and risking having it taken away – there are classic examples from the Murray
- Response (John Childs NRETA) – this is a licence condition required by Water Regulations and we are not able to change it for the current strategy. (Annual reporting requirements can identify if water is being wasted) |
| Alan Whyte PWC | - The prosecutions guideline (#7) is a bit 'draconian,' there should be a process of investigation. For instance the Howard Springs example where there was over extraction from 1 bore, but on balance the other bores were under extracting.
- Prosecutions should be accompanied by a process of consultation
- Response (John Childs NRETA) – In Ti Tree, a letter to the licensee is tabled at the WAC and is a first warning. There is some uncertainty over how you define a breach of license with precision. Recommend that the WAC gives advice on this. |
| Murray Stewart
Alice Springs Town
Council | - Who controls and owns the meters? (How can we be certain that they are reporting correctly)
- Response (John Childs NRETA) The owner owns and controls the meter (eg. golf course, horticulturalist) there is a requirement that meters are maintained to the satisfaction of the 'controller of water resources.' |

Recommendation:

NRETA planning team review proposed licensing and trading guidelines to consider comments and suggestions by steering committee



4. Review of proposed Beneficial Use zones and declarations

Jonathan Vea presented a brief overview of the revised Beneficial Uses and zones and the rationale for their development. These Beneficial Uses will be used to develop a proposal for Water Allocations. The proposal was distributed to all steering committee members during the week. The steering committee was invited to ask questions or make comments and suggestions. The discussion was very extensive, therefore the following tables summarise the key points and issues raised.

A table was prepared to document the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed zones for beneficial uses. Alternative management scenarios were also suggested:

Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of geographic zones gives a high degree of certainty (eg for a business to know where they can consider development) - Geographic zones keeps the process simpler and clearer in practice - Geographic zones have a relationship with water quality (not perfect)
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reinforces the ‘blurring’ or generalising of how regulation is applied through beneficial uses - How to control the use of high quality water at private bore? - Approach does not necessarily equate with the customers requirements - Loose sight that it is a connected system (connected to adjacent zone)
Alternatives / extensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apply licensing conditions to regulate use of better quality waters (in addition to the Beneficial Use zones) - Apply Beneficial Uses to water quality as well as geographic zones - Extend the strategy to consider water > 1000 mg/l TDS - Encourage use of water > 1000 mg/l TDS by not subjecting it to regulation (eg. allocation rules & beneficial uses)



Various issues and questions were raised regarding the proposed Beneficial Use zones. The following table documents questions or issues raised and responses provided:

Issue / concern / question	Response
Concern that geographic zones do not adequately allow regulation / management of water based on water quality	<p>John Childs (NRETA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The level of knowledge of the system is variable (for some areas we have a good understanding) - The Pine Gap / Roe Creek water above 500 TDS and below 500 TDS could potentially be mixed so that it could all be delivered to the potable criteria (of PWC) - Eastern end water (Rocky Hill) is either just under 500 ranging to well over 500. There is a difference in the ability to manage and blend it. - There is some geographic rationale linked to water quality - There are differences between zones in land-use / land tenure issues, effects of water depth and economics of extracting water - Can include more detailed management rules in the ASWRS
Concern that horticultural blocks could be placed on land that is overlaying part of the aquifer that contains good quality water	<p>John Childs (NRETA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cannot do horticulture on pastoral land, must have an excision which requires land to be passed back to the NTG to be sold under a development covenant - Investigation work (hydrological) is aimed at finding out about water quality so that we don't excise land that overlays high quality waters
Water over 1000 mg/l TDS is a potential resource that is not considered in the draft strategy. Its use may be valuable because it would take pressure off the better quality water, however its use also affects the better quality waters due to connectivity of the system.	<p>ACTION: John Childs (NRETA) to come back to the Steering Committee with a proposal for how to consider water over 1000 mg/l TDS</p>

Recommendation:

NRETA planning team investigate and propose the next steps for including water over 1000 mg/l TDS in the current ASWRS



5. Narrowing the Gap

Steering Committee members revisited their preferences for ‘maximum allowable yield.’ The resulting discussion focussed on the perceived tension between the needs and requirements of public water supply and horticulture (or other uses).

John Brisbin (ALEC) and Murray Stewart (ASTC) suggested that if the Steering Committee could not come to a consensus position on water allocation, then there may have been a lost opportunity to put a strong position to Government to achieve local self determination.

Mark Stafford Smith (DK CRC) commented that there may need to be a trade-off between interests, ultimately this is the role of public policy. Recognised the following:

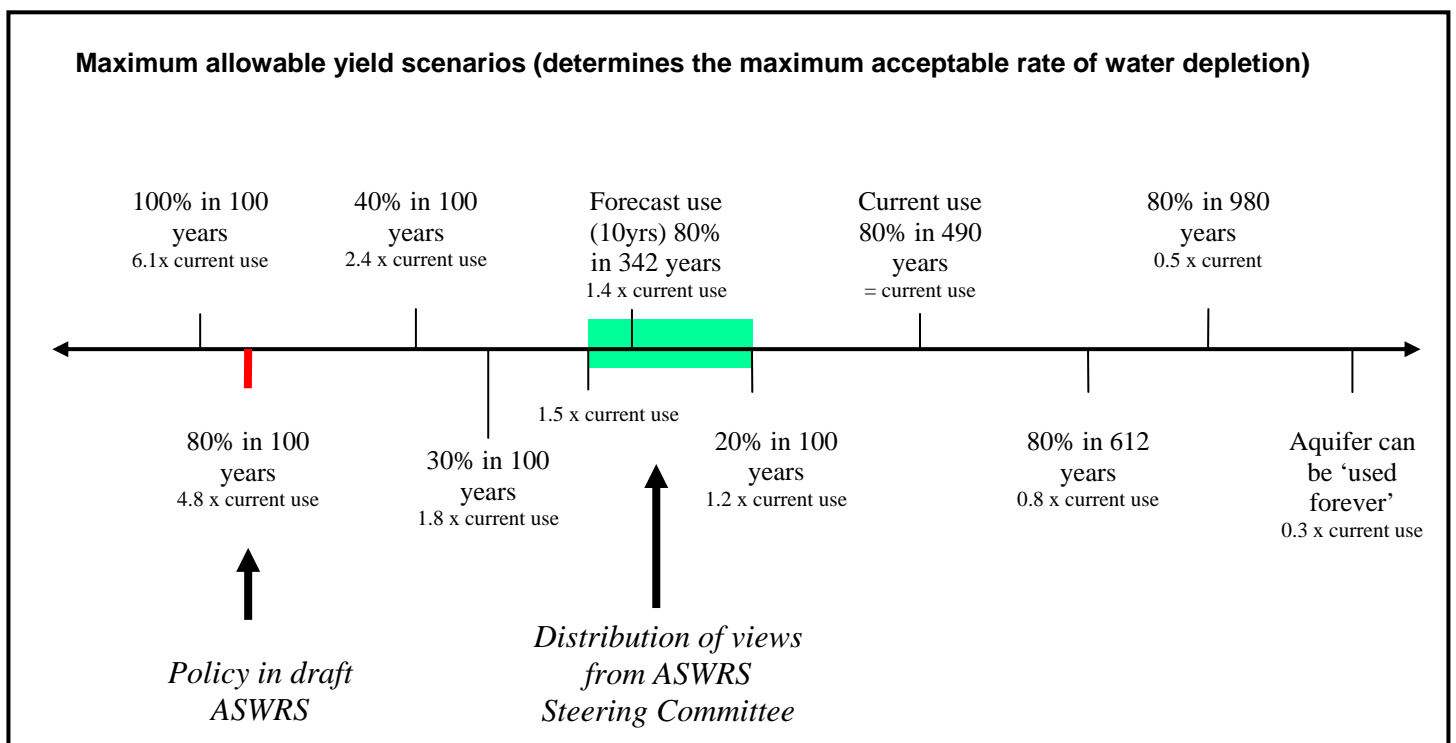
1. Even if we don’t move any further, there is a very narrow band of convergence in the positions of the interests represented.
2. Public policy is about making those tradeoffs – individual interests are less able to make those tradeoffs, it’s a political position of public policy

The following builds on discussions at the meeting to provide a clarification of the ‘zone of agreement’ reached by members of the steering committee, and further describes the opposing views of steering committee members to specific issues.

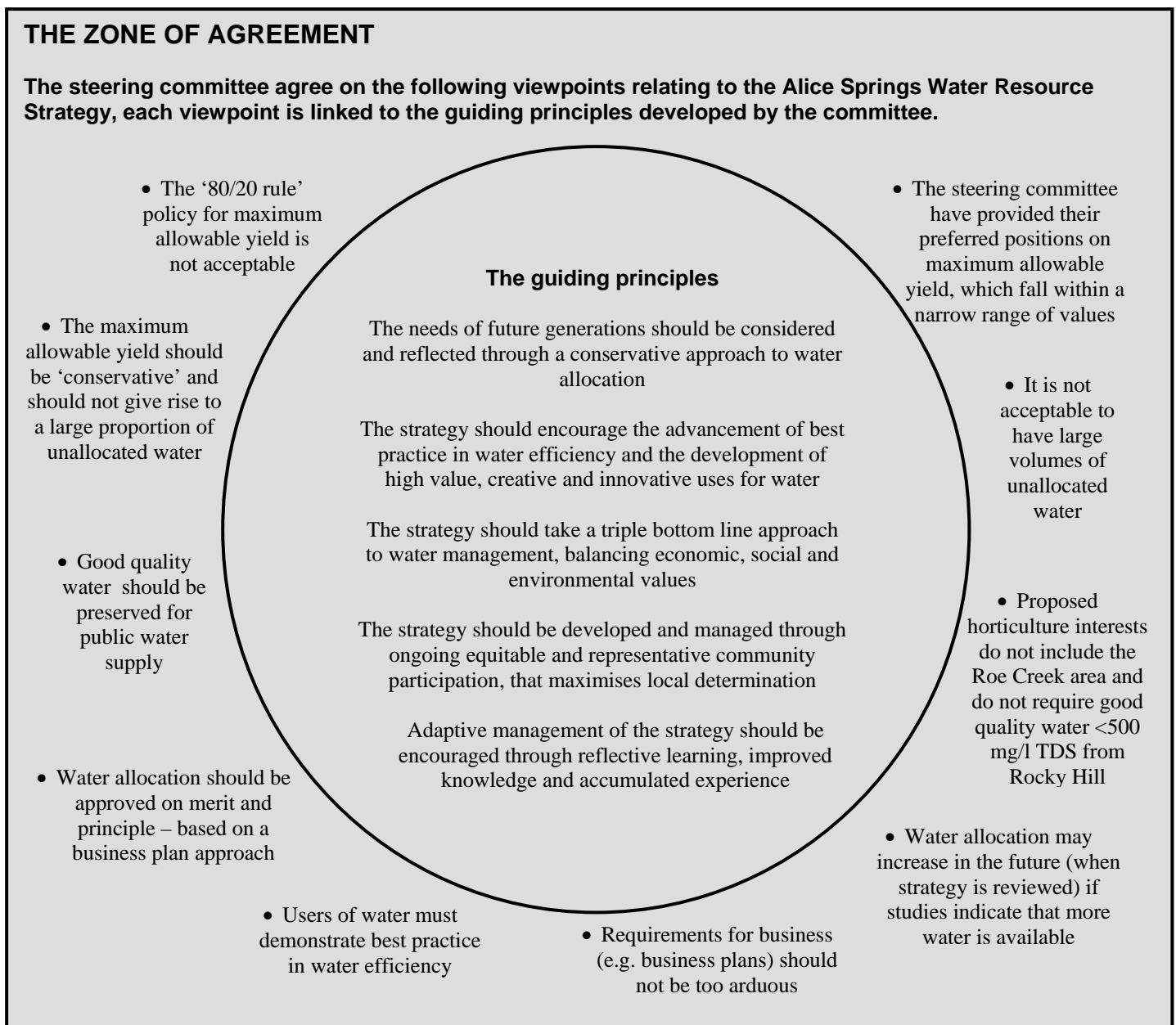
Agreement from the Steering Committee

Maximum allowable yield

Steering Committee views on ‘maximum allowable yield’ vary within a narrow range:



The following diagram illustrates the ‘zone’ or area where steering committee members are in agreement based on discussions from meeting #3 and previous meetings



Differing viewpoints on the ASWRS

Power and Water Corporation (Alan Whyte) have maintained the position that all water under 1000 mg/l TDS should be preserved for future public water supply, translating to a 100% allocation of water from the Amadeus aquifers to Beneficial Use of public water supply.

Vin Lange (NT Horticultural Partnership Group) takes the position that a percentage of poorer quality water (>500 mg/l TDS) from Amadeus aquifers in the Rocky Hill area should be allocated to agriculture. Vin makes a case for a percentage allocation to agriculture that reflects a realistic forecast for future use based on a staged development plan (over a 20 -30 year period). Vin argues that horticulture has significant social and economic benefits and that pumping from Rocky Hill will allow a better understanding of the affects of extraction on the aquifer.

5. Conclusion

Participants reflected on the next steps forward to developing recommendations on water allocations to Beneficial uses in the Amadeus Aquifers. See Recommendations below.

The meeting concluded at 5.15pm.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday 24th November 2005, 2.30pm - 5.00pm NRETA (Alice Plaza) conference room

Recommendation:

NRETA planning team propose water allocations based on maximum allowable yield and beneficial uses for consideration at steering committee meeting #4

