

Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy 2005

Alice Springs Water Resource Strategy Steering Committee Meeting # 5 "Water Advisory Committee & Work Program"

Thursday 1st December 2005

Attendees:

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

Apologies: Murray Stewart (ASTC)

Facilitators: Michelle Rodrigo, Robbie Henderson

1. Endorsement of previous meeting reports

A motion was raised by Mark Stafford Smith (DK CRC) to endorse the reports from meeting # 4, Seconded by John Brisbin (ALEC), the motion was accepted. Participants were also asked if they would give permission for meeting report # 4 to be published on the internet and provided to the minister; permission was provided by all present.

2. Water Advisory Committee

John Childs (NRETA) reviewing background information about the key terms of reference (TOR) of the Water Advisory Committee (WAC). John highlighted the process of ministerial appointment of the WAC, scope for flexibility of the role / TOR and operating arrangements, and relationship with the Urban Water Reference Group (could a WAC also fulfil the role of the UWRG?) The Ti Tree WAC was provided as an example.

Alan Whyte (PWC) spoke about the historic 'Alice Springs Water Advisory Committee' (which later changed names to the Alice Springs Water Action Group ASWAG). ASWAG had no legislative basis, but was a highly motivated and active group with a diverse representative membership (including two completely independent community members). Key success factors included having an independent chair, high profile, \$150,000 budget (paid project officer) and a good mix of representatives. Outcomes / outputs from ASWAG included lobbying government, high profile ads on TV, and the Arid Zone Gardening Booklet. ASWAG is likely to have contributed to a change in behaviour toward arid zone gardening (difficult to quantify). The negative aspects to ASWAG were 'burnout' of members due to hands on nature of the group, weighting of membership towards Government (Power & Water), and limited access to Ministers.

Role of a Water Advisory Committee

Michelle Rodrigo facilitated an activity to identify the role of a Water Advisory Committee, participants were asked to:

- Individually, write down 3 things that the AS Water Advisory Committee should do.
- Then form two groups, share lists and collectively write down on butchers paper 6 things that this committee should do.
- Each group presents back and the group then synthesise the two lists into one list of 6 key purpose statements.

It was proposed that these become recommendations for the Terms of Reference for the WAC. The following statements regarding the role of the WAC were developed:



Suggestion for role of the WAC 'things that the WAC should do'	Notes / comments
Ensure that the guiding principles are applied and monitored	
Critically review business plans for any new or altered allocations & licences, providing objective advice which helps Government make decisions	
Provide oversight (direction, review, assessment) of the ASWRS Work Plan	
Providing support and appropriate communication to other groups who's interests are sympathetic with the guiding principles Provide advice in regard to the strategic directions of the ASWRS	<i>Particularly regarding water efficiency Two way communication Not the work of WAC or subcommittee to do water conservation advocacy – requires separation of duties. A subcommittee would have to operate under the same set of rules (as WAC)</i>
Provide annual report to Minister on success and effectiveness of the WAC and the ASWRS	
Keep Government focused on the resource – maintaining, monitoring and improving knowledge to enable informed decisions and recommendations regarding actions	
Representative of diverse views and independent of Government with a significant budget	
Capacity to take information from all sectors of the community to ensure sustainable management of the resource	<i>Capacity to consider sub-committees Two way communication</i>
Power to review business plans and advise on allocations	<i>Requires expertise or capacity to employ expert / consultant and avoid bureaucratic delays Period contractor 'on tap'</i>
WAC must be able to go to the Minister if there is serious conflict / disagreement with the Controller of Water	

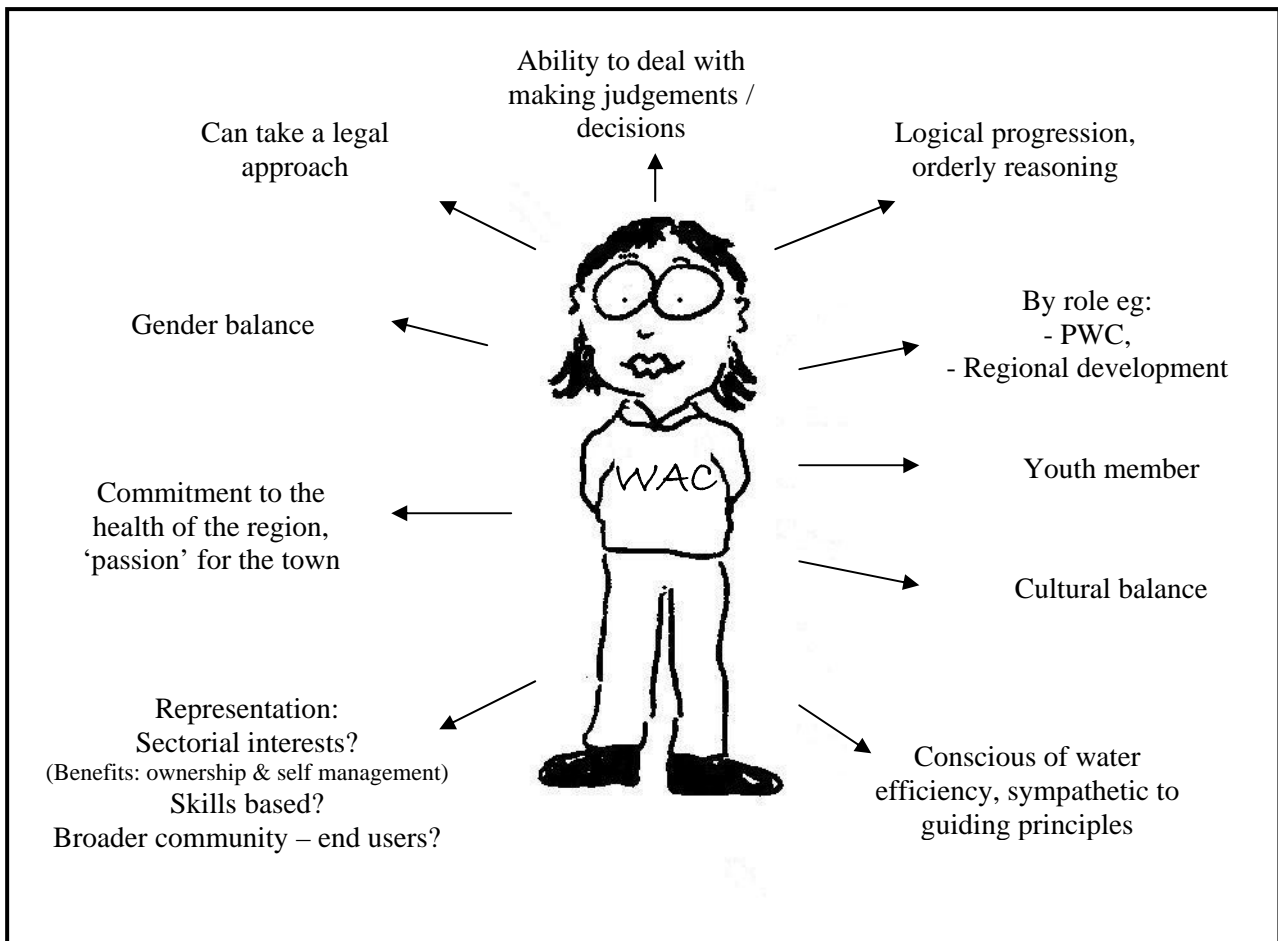
Participants were asked to identify additional issues / topics / tasks / questions / dilemmas that keep recurring in the area of water use and may potentially link with the role of the WAC. The following issues were identified:

- Regulatory issues
- Land tenure issues (pastoral lease, Native Title)
- National Water Initiative – Indigenous rights
- Trade-off issues – environmental / social / economic
- Enforcement – a grey area
- Regional development – benefits
- Dealing with exceptions to what is in the ASWRS
- Quantitative issues (volumes and percentages of water balances / allocations / entitlements etc)



Water Advisory Committee membership

The Steering Committee were asked to consider the *sort of people / skills* required in order to perform the role and address issues raised in the WAC. The following diagram was generated:



Following discussion and identification of some ideal characteristics of a WAC member/s, the Steering Committee developed a more specific list (not a complete list) of preferred WAC operational arrangements and membership structure

Operational:

- Chair – independent of Government and sectorial interests
- 2 nominees per sector – respond to “skills” criteria
- Committee needs to have a balance of skills required (individual members do not necessarily require the full range of skills / attributes)

Membership:

- Lhere Artepe (Native Title rights)
- CLC (inclusive of others without native title rights)
- Power and Water Corporation
- Agriculture (combine horticultural and pastoral)
- Conservation (Environmental) interests
- Business
- Community representative – possibly Alice Springs Town Council

(Not recorded on whiteboard, but raised):

- Youth
- Non-sectorial ‘expert’ eg. regional development / science



Northern Territory Government

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts

3. ASWRS Work Plan

Participants worked in two groups to identify key questions that need to be answered and activities that need to be undertaken to improve the ASWRS and water management in Alice Springs. Butcher's paper was provided to each group with the following headings:

- To improve knowledge: knowledge gaps that need to be filled
- To improve information & communication: methods that need to be developed
- To improve management: actions that need to be taken

The following table was transcribed from participants notes; steering committee members placed one red dot against the item that they considered to be the most 'urgent' (should be implemented in the next 1-2 years).

To improve knowledge - Gaps that need to be filled:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review data on how aquifers are tracking (changes) and develop a risk management strategy if the trends are adverse ●● Investigate alternative industries for all water qualities – proactive, user end, DPIFM Increase technologies for accessing deeper water Investigate viable technologies for desalination
To improve information & communication – Methods that need to be developed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide the wider community with good viable communication (more than newsletters, strategic communication) Public data on the efficiency of Power Water use
To improve management – Actions that need to be taken:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop licence conditions to ensure sustainable water management Facilitate rather than institute a Water Efficiency Program ● Develop an approach to maximise the life of the <500 mg/l TDS water by blending Investigate the economic feasibility of fine level management of public water supply with the objective of shifting actual usage into appropriate Beneficial Use categories ● Define guidelines for the criteria people need to address in a business plan

4. Conclusion

John Childs (NRETA) proposed alternative next steps for the steering committee, including timing and focus of the next meeting. It was agreed that the next meeting would be postponed for one week. It was agreed that the next meeting would focus on key aspects of the final 'penultimate' draft, proposal for a cabinet submission and draft community consultation report.

The meeting concluded at 5.15pm.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday 15th December 2005, 2.30pm - 5.00pm NRETA (Alice Plaza) meeting room 1: Note change of venue

ACTION:
NRETA planning team circulate key aspects of the final 'penultimate' draft, proposal for a cabinet submission and draft community consultation report prior to next meeting