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Water is a major driver of our nation’s life and prosperity. The Australian community and its leaders can’t afford to be complacent about water security for urban, regional, rural or remote communities.

In a recent Australian Water Association (AWA) member survey our members told us that water security for all Australians is their number one priority.

The Federal election has provided an opportunity to shine a light on how the major parties’ water policies address water security for all Australians.

To do this we define water security in broad terms: the certainty the Australian community can have that its water needs will be met into the future on an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable basis.

Over the next year, AWA will develop a water security scorecard to enable the Australian community to understand the current level of water security.

In the meantime, let’s look at the major parties’ water policies. All parties acknowledge in some way the importance of water security to Australia. However, AWA does not have confidence that any of the parties are adequately addressing the challenges of securing Australia’s water future.

More policy focus is needed on how the Commonwealth Government will:

- lead a national conversation with the community that raises the importance of water and engages them in a mature debate about the role we all play in securing our water future
- exercise the much-needed leadership across all levels of Government to raise and resolve water issues of national importance
- implement water policy more holistically with full regard for economic development, agriculture, mining, industry, the environment, cities and regional, rural and remote communities.

Also missing from the Federal sphere is commitment to a national mechanism within which water policy issues of national importance can be raised and resolved. With the demise of both the Council of Australian Governments’ Standing Council on Environment and Water and the National Water Commission, there is no Federal arena for the Commonwealth, States and Territories to drive:

- continuing progress on the National Water Initiative
- completion of the review of the National Water Quality Management Strategy
- a review of national catchment management arrangements
- national policy leadership on multi-jurisdictional matters in relation to water and the environment.

AWA will continue to advocate for a stronger policy focus on water security and the establishment of this type of national mechanism.
WHAT IS THE AUSTRALIAN WATER ASSOCIATION?

The Australian Water Association (AWA) is the national peak water organisation delivering information, expertise and collaboration for sustainable water management. Our 5,000-strong membership includes professionals and practitioners working in water utilities, engineering, consulting, supplies, science and research, energy and resources, water resource management, manufacturing and agriculture. We have an active branch network across all Australian States and Territories. We also maintain extensive international links, across Asia, Europe and America with peak water organisations.

AWA’S ADVOCACY ROLE

AWA is advocating for Water Security for all Australians.

AWA wants to better engage with the community on the importance of water security and the things that affect it. To do this we will create a conversation about what the current level of security is, community perceptions around this, and what action will be necessary to meet community expectations.

This will raise community awareness of the factors that improve or hinder water security, stimulate informed public debate, encourage new thinking, and promote evidence-based policy.

WHAT IS WATER SECURITY?

AWA defines water security as: “the certainty the Australian community can have that its water needs will be met into the future on an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable basis”, with those needs being:

- safe and affordable drinking water
- water to support industry and agriculture
- water management to create liveable communities
- water to protect the environment.

NATIONAL WATER SECURITY SCORECARD

To communicate to the community what the current level of security is, over the coming year, with experts and partners, AWA will develop an annual Water Security for All Australians scorecard. The scorecard, which will be launched at Ozwater17 on 16–18 May 2017, will reflect public information and:

- indicate the level of water security that exists across Australia according to supply capacity, current Government policies, and infrastructure investment plans
- highlight what has changed over the last 12 months to increase or decrease water security
- compare this with the level of security that the community expects.
The scorecard will compare water security between urban, regional, rural and remote areas, between catchments, and/or between state and territory boundaries.

Through this, AWA will play a constructive role that assists leaders across Government and industry to:

- communicate and implement clear policies and plans to ensure Australia’s water needs are met into the future in line with community expectations.
- ensure that adequate information is available to explain the current level of water security and how policies and plans will maintain or improve it.

To develop the scorecard, AWA will draw from its own annual community survey along with information that is publicly and readily available from authoritative and credible sources, including:

- Government departments with water policy and planning accountabilities
- expert agencies such as the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM), CSIRO, Infrastructure Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Infrastructure Australia
- economic, health and environmental regulators
- water utilities and infrastructure owners, both public and private sector
- peer-reviewed journal articles.

Information will include:

- data about the demands on water resources and water infrastructure due to changes in climate, population, mining, agriculture, industry and the environment
- current policies and committed investment plans
- details of how those policies and plans will improve water security
- details of how policies and plans can be expected to develop over time.

To a large degree, the scorecard will test the quality and robustness of the public information available.

AWA’s role will be to collate and interpret it for the Australian community and identify opportunities for Governments to develop a more comprehensive scorecard that will guide future planning.

From its membership and partners, AWA will form an industry reference group that will shape, develop and bring together the scorecard. Other AWA members will be able to contribute to the scorecard at State and Territory conferences and through our Specialist Networks.

The development of the scorecard will create a useful national conversation, with the opportunity to mature over time. Indeed AWA sees this work as just an initial phase to stimulate discussion.

In the following sections, AWA sets out why now is the time to focus on water security, explains the community’s water needs in more detail, acknowledges some of the work already being undertaken to secure our water, and provides an analysis and comparison of the major Federal political parties’ water policies.

**WHY NOW IS THE TIME TO FOCUS ON WATER SECURITY**

Water is a major driver of our nation’s health and prosperity. The Australian community and its leaders cannot afford to be complacent about water security for urban, regional, rural or remote communities.

Water is at the centre of economic and social development: it is vital to maintain health, grow food, generate energy, manage the environment, and create jobs.

Water is the primary medium through which climate change influences Earth’s ecosystem and, thus, the livelihood and well-being of societies.

Australia faces huge challenges to secure its water future with its changing climate and population growth. At the same time Australia is seizing the opportunities of international competitiveness, economic development, environmental protection, technology advances and social inclusion. Water security will be critical to our success as a country.

In some parts of regional, rural and remote Australia, water security is already an issue. For example, in March 2016, the Victorian Government acted to secure Ballarat’s water supply by placing an order of desalinated water to be delivered next summer, and is also soon to release a Water Plan that will help ensure Victoria is better prepared to deal with the challenges posed by changing rainfall patterns, climate change and rapid population growth.

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1. World Bank, Water overview, 14 April 2016
2. UN Water, Climate Change Adaptation: The pivotal role of water, September 2010
3. Premier of Victoria. Government acts to provide Ballarat with water security, 6 March 2016
A new crisis could come at any time. The Australian community expects its leaders in Government and industry to be proactive – to prevent a crisis rather than respond to one.

The Australian Government recognises the impact of climate change:

“Australia faces significant environmental and economic impacts from climate change across a number of sectors, including water security, agriculture, coastal communities, and infrastructure.”; and

“Decisions made today about infrastructure, health, water management, agriculture, biodiversity and housing will have lasting consequences for future generations.”

A report from the Climate Council of Australia states that:

Water scarcity will become an increasing challenge as the pressure on urban water supplies intensifies.

- Water inflows to key Sydney dams such as Warragamba and the Shoalhaven scheme could decrease by as much as 25% by 2070 if greenhouse gas emissions continue on their current trajectory.
- Annual water demand is projected to outstrip supply in Perth and surrounding regions by as much as 85 billion litres by 2030. That’s enough water to fill 34,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.
- Average annual stream flows to Melbourne’s four major water harvesting storages could decrease by 7% by 2020 and by 18% by 2050.

With climate change, rainfall in most parts of Australia will decrease and become more uncertain. Australian temperatures are projected to continue to increase, with more hot days and fewer cool days. Average rainfall in southern Australia is projected to decrease, with a likely increase in drought frequency and severity.

Climate change creates one stressor; population growth creates another. Australia’s population of 23.9 million in December 2015 is projected to increase to between 36.8 million and 48.3 million in 2061. We will also become more urbanised.

All capital cities, except Darwin, are projected to increase their share of their respective State or Territory population over the next 50 years. By 2061, Perth, Melbourne and Adelaide will have the largest shares of their respective state populations, with 85% of Western Australians living in Perth (78% in 2012), 83% of all Victorians living in Melbourne (75% in 2012), and 83% of South Australians living in Adelaide (77% in 2012).

Sydney will experience the largest gain in share, increasing to 74% of New South Wales’ population in 2061 (from 64% in 2012). Brisbane will experience the smallest gain, increasing to 52% (from 48% in 2012). Hobart’s share of Tasmania’s population is projected to increase to 48% in 2061 (from 42% in 2012). Darwin is the only capital city that is projected to decrease its share of the Northern Territory’s population, decreasing to 50% (from 56% in 2012).

All this is happening in a country in which the economy is going through great change as it moves from one based mostly on mining, commodities and fossil fuels to one also based on knowledge, services and renewables.

In this context, it is important that we understand the Australian community’s water needs, and how they relate to one another.

THE FOUR WATER NEEDS

The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG) and health-based targets provide the benchmark by which health regulators and utilities across Australia measure the safety of water for consumption by people in homes, restaurants, hospitals and manufactured food and beverages. Providing safe drinking water requires expert planning and management of catchment areas and aquifers, treatment and distribution.
Affordability of water is a complex concept. It is important for the efficient and economically sustainable use of water that it is priced to recover the cost of managing catchments and storage, desalination, treatment, transportation and sale. It is also important that continual pressure is placed on those costs so that water prices are the lowest they can be, while not compromising public health or other key objectives such as water security and environmental protection.

At the same time, there are remote and disadvantaged segments of the community that will always need targeted government assistance to afford the essentials of life, such as water.

While in Australian cities and most regional areas, safe and affordable drinking water is delivered every day, in some regional, rural and remote communities its availability is not certain and this is having an impact. Tasmania, for example, has permanent boil water alerts in place for 18 drinking water supply systems as at June 2016. NSW Health issued 23 water quality alerts between January 2013 and January 2016.

Infrastructure NSW cites 71 backlog projects in regional towns to ensure drinking water supplies meet minimum guidelines and wastewater meets environmental standards. The challenge is to overcome lack of economies of scale, particularly for treatment plants. By increasing the efficiency of water use in agriculture, industry and households, we can improve water security.

Water efficiency is an option that should always be considered in a transparent cost-benefit analysis. Other alternative options are leak management, alternative water sources such as re-use, demand management behaviour and water-efficient appliances.

Water is an essential ingredient for Australia’s economic prosperity. It is vital to food and agriculture, and future opportunities are significant if we can secure our water well.

The CSIRO says:

“We project agricultural prices to trend upwards over coming decades, reversing a long historical decline. Output of food and fibre can increase, even with substantial land use change, if declining investment in productivity is restored. However, we do not yet fully understand the potential cascading impacts of future climate change and extreme events on farms, sectors, and regions.”

Currently irrigation agriculture accounts for 57% of Australia’s water use. And with Australian agricultural output volumes projected to rise by at least 50% by 2050, this presents a clear incentive to continue to develop innovative technology and practices, and efficient water markets to underpin this growth.

10. Department of Health & Human Services, Permanent boil water alerts
11. NSW Ministry of Health, Drinking water quality and incidents
We have seen recent initiatives such as *Our North, Our Future*\(^{15}\) clearly identify food and agriculture as one of five industry pillars that play to Australia’s strengths and have the most potential for growth.

Furthermore, the White Paper recognises that reduced barriers to better use of land and water resources are essential and that “the north will never reach its potential without secure, tradeable titles to land and water”\(^{16}\).

In regional and rural Australia, securing water to support both agriculture and the environment has been a challenge taken on by Governments, industry, farmers and communities at all levels over many years, and huge advances have been made in policy, trading, technology and practice. This challenge will continue to exist to the extent our climate continues to change and our export markets expand for water-dependent export products.

Australian industry has diverse water needs and this creates opportunity. Rather than assuming all industry needs potable water, water can be supplied fit-for-purpose from a range of possible sources – stormwater, rainwater, greywater and recycled water, as well as best practice efficient water use – subject to the comparative cost.

Water management to create liveable communities

Liveable communities provide places for people to live healthy and prosperous lives, and are ideally safe from extreme water-related events such as drought and floods.

Few advances have achieved more for human and environmental health than the provision of safe drinking water and wastewater management. For Australia’s urban and regional centres, utilities provide affordable sanitation services to the vast majority of the population and industry. This involves carrying wastewater to treatment plants and then releasing suitably treated effluent into the environment: oceans, streams, and irrigation. Utilities also dispose of by-products such as biosolids. The challenge for wastewater management comes from the need to mitigate its impact on the environment during dry and wet weather, especially with population growth.

Urban stormwater is another source of pollutants, rubbish and chemicals that find their way into the environment. With rising costs, the affordability of systems to dispose of wastewater and stormwater sustainably for the environment will come under pressure.

Liveability can be achieved by using fit-for-purpose water. While stormwater has a heavy pollutant load, it is becoming increasingly important as a water resource to meet liveability objectives in urban centres. In cities, stormwater is being increasingly captured through water-sensitive urban design features to recharge local aquifers, filter nutrients and improve urban amenity.

Given our population increases, and the four million new homes that are being built between now and 2036, there is a significant opportunity to link water management policies and land use planning policies through programs like the NSW BASIX scheme. BASIX could also be expanded to include stormwater and green infrastructure.

With climate change, extreme weather events will become more frequent and severe. This is expected to increase the challenges associated with supplying high quality drinking water\(^{17}\).

In urban areas, stormwater systems will come under increasing pressure, especially around developments that require system amplifications for flooding to be avoided. New stormwater systems, or solutions to reduce stormwater run-off, will need to be implemented in new greenfield developments.

When the community considers investing in homes and businesses in areas subject to flooding, it deserves to know what level of certainty it will have that flood waters can be managed in storage systems or by other means.

The key to creating liveable communities is to bring together decision makers across State, Territory and Local Government, town planning, utilities, developers, business and the community to create zoning, plans and developments that enable the implementation of water-sensitive design.

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16. Ibid., page 5
There is a clear imperative to provide water to ensure the viability of ecosystems and biodiversity, now and for the future. Plant and animal species have a right to water security too.

The need to plan, manage and monitor a large portfolio of water for the benefit of the environment is well recognised in Australia and encompassed in the Water Act 2007. It is also recognised that providing water for consumption while providing for ecosystems often involves tradeoffs and compromises.

At its heart, the National Water Initiative set out the basis on which surface water and groundwater resources are to be shared to support resilient and viable communities, healthy ecosystems and economic development. The initiative forged a national – and bipartisan – approach to the way Australia manages, measures, plans for, prices and trades water. By putting a real value on water as a resource, water was repositioned as an economic enabler that has delivered sustained productivity gains for rural and urban Australians.

It also enables a more balanced assessment of costs and benefits of environmental impacts. Even in urban areas, water for the environment can also be an issue and can compete with its use as drinking water.

This occurs in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment around Sydney, one of the largest coastal basins in Australia. The river system is an important environmental asset and its flows are heavily controlled by five major dams to supply most of the drinking water to greater Sydney. A scheme of environmental flows began in July 2010 to mimic the natural flows of the river.

It is also important to manage the quality of water that is released into the environment inland and at sea. For example, coastal development is affecting coastal habitats that support the Great Barrier Reef. Human population increases within the Great Barrier Reef catchment are projected to be nearly two per cent per year. This will place greater pressure on the ecosystem and increase the use of the Great Barrier Reef Region.

**WORK BEING DONE TO SECURE OUR WATER FUTURE**

Certainly many leaders in Government and industry are already taking action to develop policies and plans to improve water security. Much is being done across Australia to secure our water future. The following is a sample.

**Commonwealth**

In its fourth assessment, the National Water Commission found that, while the implementation of the National Water Initiative (which commenced in 2004) remains unfinished business, it has had strong support from successive Federal, State and Territory Governments and has delivered value. The National Water Initiative established a blueprint for water governance.

Over the last decade the Commonwealth Government’s National Water Security Plan for Cities and Towns funded practical projects that save water and reduce water losses in cities, towns and remote communities nationally. The Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Programme (SRWUIP) invests:

> “… in rural water use, management and efficiency, including improved water knowledge and market reform, and water purchase for the environment. It is the key mechanism to ‘bridge the gap’ to the sustainable diversion limits under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and consists of three main components: irrigation infrastructure projects; water purchase and supply measures.”

The majority of SRWUIP infrastructure funds are committed to projects in the Murray-Darling Basin for improving the operation of off-farm delivery systems and helping irrigators improve on-farm water use efficiency.

The water savings generated from these projects are shared between the Australian Government for environmental use, and irrigators for consumptive use.

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18. CSIRO, Water: Science and Solution for Australia, Chapter 9, 2011
19. Department of Primary Industries, Office of Water, Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment
20. Ibid.
21. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Managing the reef
24. Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, Rural Water
The Australian Government, through the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), has invested in a Water Information Programme that facilitates the collection, management and dissemination of Australia’s water information. BoM’s Urban National Performance Report plays a critical role in transparent reporting for the water industry.

The existence of nationally consistent water data is essential for industry and Government to manage the water security challenge. Indeed there exists a significant opportunity for the Water Information Programme to evolve and incorporate specific water security indicators and reports, which reflect the situation in urban, regional, rural and remote Australia and provide lead indicators to Government and community. This in turn will drive infrastructure investment, technology and management innovation, and shape industry’s strategic and operational decisions within catchments.

In the 2016 Federal Budget it was pleasing to see the inclusion of a $2 billion national infrastructure loan facility to support major water infrastructure projects for agriculture over the next 10 years. This is something that the water sector has been calling for, most clearly at last year’s AWA National Water Policy Summit.

Western Australia

The Department of Water in Western Australia has just released Water for Growth: Urban, Western Australia’s Water Supply and Demand Outlook to 2050. To meet projected demand to 2050, the report highlights the need for water innovation in the public and private sectors. Given the water challenges that already exist in Western Australia, the estimate that at least an additional 250 gigalitres per year of water will be needed for Western Australia’s urban areas by the year 2050 to meet the growth in demand from householders, parks and gardens, and to produce goods and services, provides an incentive to build the state’s future water security.

It also currently has a $40 million Water for Food initiative with the objective of identifying water and land resources, as well as irrigation technologies, that can enable Western Australia’s fresh food and animal protein production to increase its contribution to regional economies by at least 50 per cent by 2025 and twofold by 2050.

Tasmania

Management of Tasmania’s freshwater resources is guided by the Tasmanian Water Management Act 1999 and the regulations that flow from it.

A predominance of hydro power generation and a major reliance on agricultural production for domestic and export earnings means that water security spans many critical aspects of Tasmanian life. The State also has a small but highly dispersed population, resulting in a share of the country’s water and wastewater treatment systems that is disproportionate to the revenue-generating capacity of its single municipal water utility.

With these challenges, all levels of Government are making heavy investments in water security, including:

- $1.5 billion investment in municipal water and wastewater infrastructure to improve health and environmental outcomes
- $350 million investment in agricultural irrigation schemes to secure water supply in a range of farming catchments.

In the wake of the recent energy crisis, the State Government has established an Energy Security Taskforce that will undertake an independent energy security risk assessment for Tasmania having regard to, among other things, best practice water management.

New South Wales

The 2010 Metropolitan Water Plan sets out the mix of supply and demand management measures that ensures a secure, cost-effective and sustainable water supply for greater Sydney.

This Plan was initially intended to be reviewed every four years and the current plan ensures “greater Sydney has enough water to meet its needs to at least 2025, and to help protect river health through environmental flows.”

The plan was due for review in 2014. Flooding in river systems is also an increasing threat to people and property in urban and regional Australia.

For example, Infrastructure NSW has identified flooding of the Hawkesbury Nepean systems to be the great natural disaster risk in New South Wales.

25. Bureau of Meteorology, Urban national performance report
27. Government of Western Australia, Water for Food
29. Metropolitan Water Directorate, 2010 Metropolitan Water Plan, page 5, August 2010
The NSW Government has announced plans to increase the height of Warragamba Dam by 14 metres to partially manage this. Since the introduction of the Water Management Act in 2000, the NSW Government is rolling out water-sharing plans for rivers and groundwater systems across the state. These plans protect the health of our rivers and groundwater while also providing water users with perpetual access licences, equitable conditions, and increased opportunities to trade water through separation of land and water.

Within the NSW 2016–17 State Budget, Minister for Primary Industries and Minister for Lands and Water Niall Blair announced funding for water security for regional towns and to support farmers during droughts:

- Around $500 million over three years to secure Broken Hill’s water supply
- $165 million to assist eligible NSW households with financial assistance to access potable water
- $75 million for water-saving infrastructure projects, funded by the Commonwealth under the Water for the Future program
- $45 million under the Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program
- $18 million to implement water reform initiatives in the Murray-Darling Basin
- $9.4 million to improve water and sewerage services for Aboriginal communities

The Office of Water is currently preparing a water strategy for NSW.

**Victoria**

The Victorian Government is currently developing a new water plan, Water for Victoria, which will set the strategic direction for water management in Victoria for decades to come, and a discussion paper was released for public consultation on 16 March 2016. The plan, which is due for release before the end of 2016, will consider nine key elements, including climate change, resilient and liveable cities and towns, waterway and catchment health, water for agriculture, and recreational values.

The Victorian Government has also provided $22 million in the 2016–17 State Budget to implement Our Catchment, Our Communities, the first state-wide strategy for integrated catchment management in Victoria.

**Queensland**

In 2014, the Queensland Government released WaterQ, a 30-year strategy for the water sector. In part, it seeks to address the challenges of supplying water to a population that will nearly double in size in both greater Brisbane and most other regions of Queensland by 2044, and the associated increase in water and food demand. Furthermore, with a vision to double agricultural production in the state by 2044, the pressure on urban and regional water supplies will intensify. Seqwater followed this in 2015 with the release of its water security program, Water for Life.

The South-East Queensland Healthy Waterways is an innovative not-for-profit, non-government organisation that brings together members from State and Local Government, utilities, industry and the community to improve catchment management and waterway health. It develops strategies, publishes report cards on the health of its various catchments, and monitors and evaluates its effectiveness. Queensland also operates a Healthy Head Waters program, which focuses on a sustainable future for the Murray-Darling Basin.

Two aspects of this program include a water use efficiency project to help irrigators improve on-farm irrigation infrastructure, and a study examining the feasibility of using coal seam gas water in addressing water sustainability and adjustment issues in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin.

**South Australia**

Water planning for South Australia is focused on ensuring long-term security. There are three types of plans to ensure the sustainable management and use of South Australia’s water resources, as well as the State’s long-term water security to support the economy, lifestyle and environment: water allocation plans, long-term plans and regional demand and supply statements.

The Water for Good Plan was developed in 2009 to provide the state “with the most secure water supply system in southern Australia.”

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31. Sydney Morning Herald, Warragamba Dam wall to be raised to avoid catastrophic flood event, 17 June 2016
32. Department of Primary Industries, Office of Water, Water sharing plans
33. NSW Government, Budget puts water security front and centre, 22 June 2016
35. Department of Land, Water and Planning, Our Catchment, Our Communities
37. Seqwater, Water for Life
38. Healthy Waterways
39. Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Healthy Headwaters program
40. Department of Environment, Water & Natural Resources, Water planning
In the face of population growth and less reliable rainfall, the Plan seeks to diversify water supplies to reduce reliance on the River Murray and other rain-dependent water sources.

**Northern Territory**

In 2015, the Northern Territory Government released *Our Water Future Discussion Paper: A Conversation with Territorians*, which highlighted pressures on water from significant economic development and population growth from 235,200 in 2012 to 450,000 by 2060.

The pressures on water security in the Northern Territory could intensify with the Commonwealth Government’s initiative Develop the North, and this highlights the need to manage competing demands for water and create a framework for sustainable water management.

**Australian Capital Territory**

The ACT Government continues to focus on long-term water security in its ACT Water Strategy 2014–44, *Striking the Balance*. As with other jurisdictions, the need to address the impacts of climate change and population growth are central to the strategy, and clear outcomes are sought in terms of healthy catchments, sustainable water supply used efficiently, and ensuring that communities value and enjoy the catchments and waterways.

**HOW DO THE FEDERAL ELECTION POLICIES OF THE MAJOR PARTIES SUPPORT WATER SECURITY FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS?**

**Our analytical approach**

AWA has examined the major parties’ water policies in terms of the role of Government in supporting water security, including the following:

- leading a national conversation with the community about the opportunities and challenges of securing Australia’s water
- defining better measures and targets for the levels of water security across Australia; that is, the level of certainty that the Australian community’s four water needs will be met into the future on an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable basis
- setting evidence-based policies, governance and regulation to create the right conditions and incentives for businesses (including utilities) and the community to use, operate and invest in water and water infrastructure – noting water policy is also a State and Territory responsibility
- creating the opportunities for Australia to build the new forms of human and intellectual capital it needs to research, innovate and develop new and better solutions – capital that can also be exported around the world.

In particular, we have examined how these policies address the priority issues that AWA’s members have identified:

- increasing community awareness of sustainable water management This includes community to understand its expectations of water security and to build an awareness of alternative water sources and ways of achieving water efficiency
- ensuring safe drinking (potable) water quality in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia While urban water standards remain high across Australia, there remains a need to confront the lack of progress of rural, regional and remote water quality in some parts of Australia. Associated with this is the need to focus on regional infrastructure, and advocating for significant attention and investment to ensure compliance with the ADWG in all areas of Australia
- enhancing Australia’s ability to lead the world in water innovation and management To meet the challenges of Water Security for All Australians the water industry needs to apply innovation and best practice in technology, engineering and management practices. Government can support this through water innovation policy that provides incentives for investment in R&D that are linked to rapid commercialisation, and ensuring effective use of funds and industry uptake to maximise return on investment
- a whole of government approach There is a need for a new focus and mechanism to better manage Australia’s water resources and ensure policy settings are well targeted and are delivering the desired outcomes. To deliver a sustainable, high-quality supply for business, the environment and communities in urban, regional and rural Australia requires a renewed commitment from all levels of Government to a coordinated, overarching policy framework that addresses these priorities.

The Table on page 15 contains a breakdown and comparison of the water policy statements provided to AWA by the major parties:

- Australian Greens (Greens)
- Australian Labor Party (ALP)
- Coalition of the Liberal Party and the Nationals (Coalition)
- Nick Xenophon Team (NXT)

These policy statements will be posted on our website.

**Australian Greens**

The centrepiece of the Greens’ policy is the establishment of a Sustainable Water Institute from 2017, a research hub to improve urban water use and build water resilience. The Greens would also see sustainable water use included as a compulsory element of planning in Commonwealth, State and Territory water reform legislation and agreements.

The Greens support the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and want to see the return of water to environmental flows through improved irrigation water efficiency and the buyback of entitlements in severely degraded and over-allocated systems. They believe the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must have an opportunity to participate in water catchment planning and management, and that there should be no new large-scale dams on Australian rivers.

**Australian Labor Party**

The ALP would move the water portfolio back to the Department of Environment to ensure a whole-of-Government coordination. It also supports the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and would continue plans to control European carp.

The ALP would extend the water trigger in the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act* to include shale and tight formation gas projects to further mitigate risks to our water resources.

The ALP’s remaining focus is on research, innovation and climate change. It would reverse recent funding cuts to the CSIRO, increase its funding by $249 million over four years, and invest $50 million in climate and reef research. With regard to the impact of climate change on water security, the ALP commits to a Climate Change Action Plan with targets to achieve significant emission reductions.

**Liberal-National Coalition**

The Coalition statement recognises the important leadership role of the Commonwealth.

The Coalition will encourage the States and Territories to fully implement the NWI because it believes this would deliver effective water planning, secure water entitlements, and ensure the risks associated with changes in future water availability are shared between Governments and water users.

The rest of the policy focuses primarily on infrastructure to provide water for agriculture, specifically dams and pipelines. Like the Greens and the ALP, the Coalition supports the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The Coalition is investing in investigations, feasibility studies and business cases for projects to develop catchments, to improve water efficiency in agriculture, and to re-use urban water for agricultural purposes. Thirdly, through a $500 million National Water Infrastructure Development Fund and a $2 billion National Water Infrastructure Loan Facility, the Coalition will fund up to 50% of major water infrastructure projects.

**Nick Xenophon Team**

The NXT policy focuses primarily on stormwater capture and reuse. NXT believes that as part of the development of the National Stormwater Initiative, the Australian, State and Territory Governments should consider new funding models and financial incentives that would facilitate improved stormwater management outcomes in an economically efficient way.

They also believe that wasteful practices throughout the Murray-Darling Basin must be addressed as a matter of urgency to ensure a fair distribution of water rights across the entire system.

**CONCLUSIONS**

All parties acknowledge in some way the importance of water security to Australia. However, no party provides a policy that comprehensively addresses it at a Commonwealth level.

More policy focus is needed on how the Commonwealth Government will:

- lead a national conversation with the community that raises the importance of water and engages them in a mature debate about the role we all play in securing our water future
- exercise the much-needed leadership across all levels of Government to raise and resolve water issues of national importance
- implement water policy more holistically with full regard for economic development, agriculture, mining, industry, the environment, cities and regional, rural and remote communities.
Also missing from the Federal sphere is commitment to a national mechanism within which water policy issues of national importance can be raised and resolved. With the demise of both Council of Australian Governments’ Standing Council on Environment and Water and the National Water Commission, there is no Federal arena for the Commonwealth and the States and Territories to come together to drive:

- continuing progress on the National Water Initiative
- completion of the review of the National Water Quality Management Strategy
- a review of national catchment management arrangements
- national policy leadership on multi-jurisdictional matters in relation to water and the environment.

AWA will continue to advocate for a stronger policy focus on water security and the establishment of a national mechanism.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

AWA will advocate and advise Governments and the community on how to improve water security in the best interests of the country. To strengthen its expertise and capacity, AWA invites support from industry and community associations, utilities and corporations that aspire to be national leaders in advancing Australia’s water security.

Under the banner of Water Security for All Australians, AWA and its partners will:

- conduct the Australian Water Community Survey to ascertain community response to these water issues and publicly release the results in October 2016 to coincide with the World Water Congress in Brisbane and National Water Week
- conduct briefings to Government and the media
- prepare discussion papers designed to introduce concepts and ideas that advance the understanding of, and opportunities to improve, water security
- launch the Water Security for All Australians scorecard at Ozwater’17 on 16–18 May 2017
- based on feedback from its members, Government and the community, continue to improve the scorecard and quality of debate.

Discussion paper topics might include:

- Alternative models for financing water infrastructure
- Strategic procurement by utilities of goods and services
- Results and implications of the Australian Water Community Survey
- The safety and affordability of drinking water in regional, rural and remote Australia
- Opportunities for the wider use of water markets and trading
- Securing water in our cities, alternative supply options
- Water innovations in agriculture and environmental protection
- The impacts of using water in mining, and the impacts of mining on water in Australia
- Actively engaging the community in water security
- Improving urban planning to achieve better water outcomes
- The effectiveness of environmental flows.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE OF GOVERNMENT</th>
<th>AUSTRALIAN GREENS</th>
<th>AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY</th>
<th>LIBERAL-NATIONAL COALITION</th>
<th>NICK XENOPHON TEAM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leading a national conversation with the community</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
<td>The Commonwealth chairs committees on the Murray-Darling, Lake Eyre and Great Artesian Basin, as well as several other water policy forums at a Government officials level.</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
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<td>2. Defining better measures and targets</td>
<td>States and Territories should adopt targets for reducing water consumption, and increasing recycling and reuse.</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
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<td>3. Setting evidence-based policies, governance and regulation</td>
<td>Have a fully costed plan to establish a Sustainable Water Institute from 2017 onwards. This research hub would administer $25 million per year to improve urban water use and build water resilience.</td>
<td>The best way to ensure our limited and precious water resources are properly allocated and managed in a sustainable way is to have water policy based on science and productivity.</td>
<td>Believes that implementation of the National Water Initiative (NWI) would deliver effective water planning, secure water entitlements, and ensure the risks associated with changes in future water availability are shared between Governments and water users.</td>
<td>The dominance of state-owned water monopolies, with a focus on water supply and sanitation can and do act to distort policy settings and lead to inefficient investments in the medium and long term. Furthermore, ‘monopoly positions of state owned water utilities’ act as barriers to entry for private sector investment in stormwater management.</td>
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<td>4. Creating the opportunities for Australia to build new forms of human and intellectual capital relating to water</td>
<td>Believe the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must have the opportunity to participate in water catchment planning and management, and there should be no new large-scale dams on Australian rivers.</td>
<td>Publicly committed to using ministerial authority to stop this round of [CSIRO] job cuts.</td>
<td>Will commission an independent review of the CSIRO’s structure, management and functions.</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
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<td>5. Increasing community awareness of sustainable water management</td>
<td>Committed to water security through water-sensitive design, efficiency, capture and reuse, and responsive agricultural systems. Australia’s major water supplies should be publicly managed through a system of regulated water allocations. It is critical that we shift to more sustainable water use practices and bolster our long-term water security.</td>
<td>Recognises the importance of securing clean, safe and sustainable water resources for all Australians.</td>
<td>Investing in feasibility studies and business case development of new in-stream and off-stream storages, and in water efficiency in more developed catchments, in Queensland.</td>
<td>Stormwater harvesting – NXT says this is more efficient than desalination – must be fast-tracked. The costs of failed and inadequate stormwater planning, and resourcing for it, are borne by the nation as a whole via the direct costs of flood recovery, clean-up, higher insurance premiums, riparian management, and of course water security. Climate change poses a number of growing threats that are best managed through pro-active planning and co-investment. Stormwater needs to play a key role in the water security of Australia, and with it deliver a whole range of other benefits.</td>
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AWA PRIORITIES

- Committed to water security through water-sensitive design, efficiency, capture and reuse, and responsive agricultural systems.
- Australia’s major water supplies should be publicly managed through a system of regulated water allocations.
- It is critical that we shift to more sustainable water use practices and bolster our long-term water security.
- Recognises the importance of securing clean, safe and sustainable water resources for all Australians.
- Investing in feasibility studies and business case development of new in-stream and off-stream storages, and in water efficiency in more developed catchments, in Queensland.
- Investigating agricultural re-use of urban water around Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.
- Stormwater harvesting – NXT says this is more efficient than desalination – must be fast-tracked.
- The costs of failed and inadequate stormwater planning, and resourcing for it, are borne by the nation as a whole via the direct costs of flood recovery, clean-up, higher insurance premiums, riparian management, and of course water security.
- Climate change poses a number of growing threats that are best managed through pro-active planning and co-investment.
- Stormwater needs to play a key role in the water security of Australia, and with it deliver a whole range of other benefits.
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<tr>
<td><strong>6. Ensuring safe drinking (potable) water quality in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia</strong></td>
<td>Access to clean and adequate water is fundamental to life, and all Australians should be guaranteed water supply that meets their basic human needs - regardless of capacity to pay.</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
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<td><strong>7. Enhancing Australia's ability to lead the world in water innovation and management</strong></td>
<td>By investing in world-leading research, we can take action to improve our water resilience and reduce our burden on the environment. As the driest inhabited continent on Earth, Australia has the chance to lead on water innovation, security and resilience.</td>
<td>Will ensure the mining industry operates at the highest environmental standards and ensure full assessment and management of environmental and other impacts, including on water resources. Will give CSIRO the resources it needs to drive innovation and ground-breaking research that has the potential to change the world. Will provide CSIRO with a funding boost of $249 million over four years. Will also invest an additional $50 million in CSIRO to conduct essential climate and reef research to protect the Great Barrier Reef. Will prioritise science and research in the national interest – and in the interest of future generations.</td>
<td>No stated policy for water. A National Innovation and Science Agenda was introduced in December 2015 on four key pillars: i. Culture and capital ii. Collaboration iii. Talent and skills iv. Government as an exemplar.</td>
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<td><strong>8. A whole-of-Government approach</strong></td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
<td>Management of our water resources should be a crucial area of concern for all Governments, especially in light of likely impacts from climate change as well as new mining technologies. Will move the Water Portfolio back into the Department of Environment where it belongs and will ensure a whole-of-Government coordination for water policy.</td>
<td>Recognises that water resource management and delivery is primarily the responsibility of the State and Territory Governments under Australia’s federated structure. Also recognises that the Commonwealth Government can play a significant leadership role, particularly in cross-jurisdictional matters such as the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and the Great Artesian and Lake Eyre basins.</td>
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### Murray-Darling Basin

- Committed to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan
- Supports reforms to keep the system healthy all the way up from the Murray mouth, winding back the over-allocation of water and restoring precious ecosystems so they can keep sustaining Australia
- Wants reforms that will assist all Basin communities to build their jobs and economies and restore our internationally recognised wetlands and productive agricultural areas to good health.

- The Murray-Darling Basin Plan, or the ‘Basin Plan’, had bipartisan support at the Federal level and the support of the Basin States: South Australia, Victoria, NSW, Queensland and the ACT
- The Aboriginal nations and communities in the Basin want and should have access to the flows they need to ensure the continuation of their culture and their social and economic wellbeing
- If elected, will work with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, Basin States and stakeholders to ensure the Basin Plan is delivered in full and on time
- What’s most important is stability and consistency
- Acknowledges the increasing pressure [the carp population] has placed on our waterways and native wildlife and, as such, fully supports the research being undertaken by the CSIRO’s Australian Animal Health Laboratory
- A Labor Government will continue with the plans to control carp in the Murray-Darling.

- Supports the Murray-Darling Basin Plan
- It is particularly important for South Australia’s river system that upstream states meet their end of the bargain when it comes to upholding the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. Each of the states that are party to the plan set these rules. It was done so by consensus, based on the science and must not be undone
- The plan must be subject to regular and robust scrutiny.

### Feasibility studies, investigations and planning assessments

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| **Murray-Darling Basin** | - Committed to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan  
- Supports reforms to keep the system healthy all the way up from the Murray mouth, winding back the over-allocation of water and restoring precious ecosystems so they can keep sustaining Australia  
- Wants reforms that will assist all Basin communities to build their jobs and economies and restore our internationally recognised wetlands and productive agricultural areas to good health. | - The Murray-Darling Basin Plan, or the ‘Basin Plan’, had bipartisan support at the Federal level and the support of the Basin States: South Australia, Victoria, NSW, Queensland and the ACT  
- The Aboriginal nations and communities in the Basin want and should have access to the flows they need to ensure the continuation of their culture and their social and economic wellbeing  
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- Acknowledges the increasing pressure [the carp population] has placed on our waterways and native wildlife and, as such, fully supports the research being undertaken by the CSIRO’s Australian Animal Health Laboratory  
- A Labor Government will continue with the plans to control carp in the Murray-Darling. | - Supports the Murray-Darling Basin Plan  
- It is particularly important for South Australia’s river system that upstream states meet their end of the bargain when it comes to upholding the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. Each of the states that are party to the plan set these rules. It was done so by consensus, based on the science and must not be undone  
- The plan must be subject to regular and robust scrutiny. |
| **Feasibility studies, investigations and planning assessments** | No stated policy | Will extend the current Water Trigger [in the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EBPC) Act] to include shale and tight formation gas projects  
Through this process projects will be required to put in place systems to protect the environment if required and the concerns of communities in vulnerable regions can be mitigated. | The development of new water infrastructure requires extensive planning work – the water resource needs to be properly understood, the environmental water requirements need to be properly evaluated and future water uses need to be committed to purchasing new water entitlement  
In less-developed catchments in Queensland, investing in feasibility studies and business case development for new in-stream and off-stream storages  
Particularly around Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, investing in studies to investigate the re-use of urban wastewater for industrial and agricultural use. | No stated water policy. |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Past policies and plans</th>
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<td><strong>Support for new infrastructure projects</strong></td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
<td>Supports economically and environmentally viable water infrastructure projects, but also understands we can improve our soils quicker than we can build dams. Will place an emphasis on water efficiency and the best possible utilisation of our precious water resources.</td>
<td>Through $500 million National Water Infrastructure Development Fund and $2 billion National Water infrastructure Loan Facility, will fund up to 50% of major water infrastructure projects. In more developed catchments, investing in new infrastructure that can improve efficiency, such as pipelines, channel lining and improved metering.</td>
<td>As part of the development of the National Stormwater Initiative, the Australian, State and Territory Governments consider new funding models and financial incentives that would facilitate improved stormwater management outcomes in an economically efficient way. Irrigators should more easily be able to access Federal infrastructure grants for value adding to agriculture produce.</td>
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<td><strong>Climate change action</strong></td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
<td>Committed to a comprehensive Climate Change Action Plan, including the following targets: - Net Zero Pollution by 2050 consistent with the international agreement to achieve a balance between emissions generated and those offset, sequestered or removed in the second half of this century. - 45 per cent emissions reduction on 2005 levels by 2030, consistent with the advice of the Climate Change Authority. - 2025 emissions reduction target within one year of being elected. - Five-yearly reviews – which will ensure that policy goals are continually updated to be consistent with the latest science. - $17.4 million over the forward estimates to reverse abolition of the Climate Change Authority and ensure that it continues to be appropriately resourced to achieve its role.</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
<td>No stated water policy.</td>
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<td><strong>Murray-Darling Basin</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Invested $13 billion in sustainable water use</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td><strong>Planning assessments</strong></td>
<td>Added a Water Trigger to the EPBC Act to ensure impacts from ‘coal seam gas (CSG) development’ and ‘large coal mining development’ on our water resources are fully assessed and mitigated. CSG and large coal mining developments that have, will have, or are likely to have, a significant impact on water resources require the approval of the Environment Minister under the EPBC Act.</td>
<td>In northern Australia, invested $15 million in three water resource assessments in undeveloped catchments. Invested over $60 million in 44 planning assessments for new projects.</td>
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WHO DO I CONTACT AT AWA ABOUT ITS ADVOCACY PLATFORM?

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