

WATER

The Problem

The current drought, exacerbated by global warming, has shown that current levels of water use are completely unsustainable in Australia, the world's driest inhabited continent. Excessive water use, especially by heavy industry and water-intensive agribusiness, is causing irreparable damage to our fragile ecosystems and creating chronic water shortages.

Conventional free-market economics aims to solve this problem by putting a price on water and allowing it to be traded by those who can afford to purchase it.

This approach allows governments to ignore the real challenge of conserving water properly and rationing its use according to need. Trading in water encourages speculation and the most profitable rather than the most sustainable and socially just uses. It leads to poor farming practices and increased prices for residential use.

The National Water Initiative has this approach. It is also insufficiently funded to achieve the wholesale conversion of water infrastructure and reduction in water demand that the ecosystems along the Murray-Darling basin need to recover.

Our Solution

A serious water conservation policy has to target the big industrial and agricultural water users. Currently the lack of water conservation by industry and agribusiness means that the efforts of householders to conserve water are being wasted.

The Socialist Alliance says that water is not simply a commodity or an input into industry and agriculture but is the central element of our ecosystems. Instead of market-based approaches we advocate an all-round plan for water sustainability based on a thorough scientific assessment of rivers, wetlands and water tables.

The knowledge of Indigenous communities is an essential part of making that assessment and developing sound proposals for water conservation.

In the country, measures to preserve normal water flows in rivers and wetlands and implement low-input sustainable farming practices are essential. In the cities, we need to reduce water waste and start harvesting storm water and recycling waste water.

There is enough water for everyone if comprehensive conservation measures are adopted and its use is allocated fairly. Such an approach will also remove the need to build further large, environmentally damaging, dams.

To achieve the goal of water sustainability, public ownership and democratic, accountable management of water resources is essential. Unless the water supply is publicly owned, the profit motive will always disrupt scientifically-based water conservation measures.

No privatisation of water

- ✓ No privatisation of water and water infrastructure (dams, water pipelines, pumping stations). Where these have already been privatised, they should be returned to public ownership
- ✓ No public-private partnerships for water projects. All water projects to be 100% in public hands.

No water trading

- ✓ Establish water allocations for each catchment and region based on the assessed needs (scientific, environmental, agricultural/industrial, domestic) of that area
- ✓ No trading of water "rights" for speculative purposes
- ✓ End schemes for trading between regions, such as the pipeline being built to Melbourne from the Goulburn Valley



Create an all-round water conservation plan

a. In the country

- ✓ Build irrigation pipelines to save water evaporating in open-channel irrigation areas
- ✓ Promote and fund conversion to drip irrigation wherever practicable
- ✓ Reduce water extraction rates from groundwater systems until depletion ceases
- ✓ Stop land clearing and logging in important water catchments to preserve water quality. Increase funding to land clearing prevention services
- ✓ Implement plans to restore water catchment areas and halt the damage done by land clearing, erosion and mining.. Prioritise the replanting of native vegetation in damaged catchment areas
- ✓ Fund education and appropriate assistance for farming communities to move to lower water-use crops and farming practices
- ✓ Phase out water-intensive monoculture crops in climatic regions which remain unsustainable

b. In urban areas

- ✓ Improve urban water conservation by providing grants to subsidise installation of water tanks, grey water systems, and dry composting toilets
- ✓ Recycle water for appropriate industrial and outdoor use
- ✓ Enforce conservation measures on industrial and commercial water users
- ✓ Require sustainable water use planning for all new industrial, commercial and agricultural developments
- ✓ Establish comprehensive water efficiency standards for appliances

c. Desalination

- ✓ Use desalination, which consumes vast amounts of energy, only as a last resort
- ✓ Oppose the building of desalination plants unless they use renewable energy and brine discharge is avoided (for example by producing commercial salt instead of waste brine)

Restore adequate river flows

- ✓ Establish adequate, scientifically based, flow targets for all river systems
- ✓ Use the water made available by conservation measures to restore flow levels in rivers and wetlands to a level sufficient to sustain the river ecosystem in its natural state or as close as can be scientifically determined
- ✓ Buy back water allocations to increase flows further if conservation measures are insufficient. If necessary increase funding for buying back water allocations
- ✓ Fully protect the rivers of northern Australia in order to prevent a recurrence of the Murray-Darling disaster

Full support to affected communities

- ✓ Provide financial assistance for transition, including relocation and retraining, to regional communities where farming and other activity is stopped or severely curtailed by water conservation measures and/or ongoing drought and climate change
- ✓ Assist rural communities to establish sustainable farming practices to maintain national food supply
- ✓ Increase funding to Landcare to provide permanent employment for farmers displaced by water conservation measures and climate change