

Acknowledgements

Australians love talking water. Inevitably it seems, major debates about the future of this country return to water. If we've overcome the tyranny of distance, we have hardly begun to scratch the surface of learning to live in the driest inhabited country on the planet.

It all makes for interesting book writing. The Farmhand Foundation approached us in March 2003 to write a book that was for the people, rather than specialists. The Foundation's work in raising and distributing 'rescue packages' for farmers in drought was to be followed up with a look at the real story behind our water. We were to hold up a mirror to our collective water habits, airing both our 'dirty laundry' and our water-smart innovations.

Our timeline was to be 'print ready' within 5 months. The challenge was immense. We plunged headfirst into the depths of Australia's water consciousness. It was to be a people's book – aimed at promoting discussion and initiating change – so that as a nation we can find ways to live harmoniously in a land battered by 'droughts and flooding rains'. We hope this has been achieved.

Early on, it became obvious that despite the abundance of excellent books and documents about water in Australia, there wasn't a source that pulled all the vital water facts together in one 'easy read'. We found that populist myths about water in Australia abound. Although in recent times there has been a focus on improving how we use water in the home, most Australians are unaware that only 8% of water is used within households, while over 70% of our water is used in agriculture.

Talking Water reviews the vast spectrum of ideas regarding water creation and water management in Australia; some suggested by individuals in passing, others well documented, and several being implemented as we wrote. By virtue of diversity, we can approach the water debate with a wide lens. There are no rose-coloured glasses here, only real facts.

Talking Water is hopefully more than a 'good read', but also a reference book for further reading. We have tried to include all of the key sources that could add value to the water debate in Australia, the most recent science, the most relevant information. The internet has been an invaluable source of information (thanks Google), and we have provided links to the webpages for your own home surfing.

We have many people to thank in the creation of *Talking Water*. Back in Newcastle, a region famous for 'telling it how it is', our team worked hard as the much needed autumn rains lashed at the windows. Thanks firstly to Jim Keary, and to our super sleuth researchers Shell, Kath, Liv, Jeff and Evan. Much appreciation to Wendy George, CEO Farmhand Foundation, Andrew Richards, Farmhand Foundation and Les Hoffman, News Limited; Simon Milner and Kerri Kennedy of Kennedy Milner Pty Ltd, responsible for layout.

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And finally, a special thank-you to the individual Australians from all corners of the country who went out of their way to help us talk 'real' water, those in water authorities around the country who talked passionately about their particular water specialty and all those who contributed maps and photos, especially CSIRO Land and Water.

While some reviewers thought the book might be too technical, others thought it was too general; we hope we've struck a balance that talks to you!

We hope you enjoy talking water.

Michael Osborne
Claire Dunn

The Team

The Writers

Michael Osborne manages a team of water management and environmental specialists. He has worked for more than 20 years in the water industry, and has carried out work for more than 30 water businesses in Australia, Britain, Hong Kong, the Solomon Islands and Vietnam. Michael was the project leader of the team that put together this book. Michael has a Bachelor of Engineering Degree, a Master of Environmental Studies Degree from Newcastle University and a Graduate Diploma of Management from Deakin University. Michael is currently the Manager of Strategic Services in Hunter Water Australia.

Claire Dunn is a writer who has worked as a freelance journalist, an education officer, a volunteer for environment organisations, as well as a document producer for the University of Cambridge. She has had work published in a number of magazines and newspapers and particularly loves 'making real issues talk to real people'. She was a key writer and researcher of this guidebook. Claire has a Bachelor of Media from Macquarie University.



(Clockwise from top left)
Kathryn Keeley,
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Evan Renwick is a civil engineer who has worked on a diverse range of projects from the structural design of small residential and multi-storey buildings to water and wastewater investigation studies. He graduated from Newcastle University with a 1st class honours degree in civil engineering.

Olivia Dunn is a public relations/ marketing specialist with a diverse range of experience in areas such as media relations and project management through her volunteer work during her studies. She has a Diploma in Business from Macleay College Sydney and is currently the Marketing Co-ordinator for Hunter Water Australia.

The Researchers

Jeffrey Gleeson is an engineer with more than 27 years of professional experience in the field of civil design. He has worked both overseas and in Australia and is a Fellow of the Institution of Engineers, Australia. He is currently the Manager of Engineering and Technical Services in Hunter Water Australia.

Michelle Kiejda is an environmental scientist with a wide range of training and experience in environmental fields. Michelle is currently managing a Water Sensitive Urban Design research project in Newcastle in collaboration with Newcastle City Council, Newcastle University and Hunter Water Corporation.

Kathryn Keeley is an environmental scientist with a variety of practical and professional experience. Kathryn also has hands-on experience in land rehabilitation and revegetation

The Reviewers

Jim Keary has 30 years of practical experience in water management ranging from irrigation, regional urban to national matters. He is Chief Executive of Hunter Water Australia Pty Limited which is a specialist water consultancy servicing the needs of water agencies and councils in Australia and overseas. Jim worked with his colleague John Paterson on the Farmhand water agenda and took over the lead role when John died suddenly.



Brian McRae is the Chief Policy Officer for the Australian Water Association. Since 1998, Brian has coordinated submissions for five water-related parliamentary inquiries and spearheaded the growth of AWA's popular email News. Prior to AWA, Brian led Warringah Council's (NSW) Catchment Management Team, held several watershed-based roles over a seven-year span at the City of Los Angeles and worked for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) and Parsons Engineering Science. He holds a Master degree in Environmental Planning and Policy (CSUF), a Bachelor of Arts in Biology and Natural History (UCSC) and is currently pursuing a Diploma in Law (NSW LPAB).



James Moody was awarded the Young Australian of the Year in Science and Technology in 2001, as well as the Australian Young Professional Engineer of the Year in 2000. He is co-chair of the youth advisory council to the UN Environment Program and a member of the UN Secretary General's Taskforce on Science and Technology. James has a Bachelor of Electrical Engineering and Information Technology from the Queensland University of Technology and is currently undertaking PhD research in innovation theory at the Australian National University. James is Managing Director of the environmental spatial information company Natural Resource Intelligence.



Glossary

Acidification: reduction in pH, usually in soil. Acidification can result in poorly structured or hard-setting topsoils that don't support enough vegetation to prevent soil erosion.

Agroforestry: is a dynamic, ecologically-based farming system, that, through the integration of trees in farms, diversifies and sustains production for increased social, economic and environmental benefits for land users.

Annuals: plants that live for one growing season.

Aqueducts: a conduit or pipe used to convey water over a long distance.

Aquifer: porous sediments and rocks that hold and yield groundwater.

Arid: arid and semi-arid lands are those remote, sparsely populated areas of inland Australia, defined by the presence of desert vegetation and land forms as well as by low rainfall. They are bound by average annual rainfalls of about 250mm in the south, 800mm in the north and about 500mm in the east. A dominant characteristic of semi-arid environments is variable rainfall patterns, both within and between years.

Biodiversity: the variety of life forms including plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form. It is usually considered at three levels – species diversity, genetic diversity, and ecosystem diversity.

Biodynamic farming: is a branch of organic farming, originating from principles first laid down by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner in the 1920's. It involves compost preparations to increase soil biological activity (based on cow manure and soil and plant activators) and planting by the phases of the moon.

Biomass: the total living matter in a specific area.

Bioregions: an area constituting a natural ecological community with characteristic flora, fauna, and environmental conditions and bounded by natural rather than artificial borders. According to Environment Australia, Australia can be divided into 85 bioregions.

Bore: a hole drilled vertically into the ground to tap into groundwater. It contains a pipe through which groundwater can be pumped, or can flow to the surface by the pressure of the aquifer.

Catchment: a catchment area or basin is land that is bounded by natural features such as hills or mountains, from which all rain flows to a low point.

Cumulus: a dense, white, fluffy, flat-based cloud with a multiple rounded top and a well-defined outline.

Divertible Resource: the portion of runoff and recharge that can be developed for human use.

Drought: refers to an acute water shortage. The term is relative because water availability, which depends on supply and demand, is affected by regional differences in both the climate and the activities of the water user. Drought declaration is the responsibility of State governments, which must consider other factors apart from rainfall. The Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology defines a **severe drought** as occurring when the rainfall for the period is in the lowest 5% of all recorded rainfall; the drought is called **serious** when the rainfall for the period is above the lowest 5% but below the lowest 10% of all recorded rainfall for the area.

Ecologically Sustainable Development: Australia's National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development 1992 defines ecologically sustainable development (ESD) as 'using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained, and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased'.

Ecosystem: a functional system which includes communities of living organisms and the associated physical, non-living environment, which interact to form an ecological unit such as a tidal rockpool, wetland or forest.

Effluent: the water by-product of a wastewater treatment process, such as from a sewage treatment works or a dairy farm treatment works.

Environmental flows: periods of inundation, periods of drying, or river or creek flows allocated or provided for the maintenance of aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

Estuaries: an arm of the sea that extends inland to meet the mouth of a river.

Evaporation: the process of water changing from a liquid to vapour. This can be compared to **transpiration**, which is the process that vegetation uses to emit water vapour from their leaves. Vegetation pumps an enormous amount of water

from the soil into the air, essentially driving the water cycle. **Evapo-transpiration** refers to water vapour returned to the atmosphere, either by direct evaporation or by transpiration from plants.

Filtration: the act of removing solids from liquids or gases, or for removing particular types of light through a filter or some other devise.

Fossil fuel: a hydrocarbon deposit, such as petroleum, coal, or natural gas, derived from living matter of a previous geologic time and used as an energy source.

Greenhouse effect: is a natural warming process of the earth. According to the Commonwealth Bureau of Meterology, when the sun's energy reaches the earth some of it is reflected back to space and the rest is absorbed. The absorbed energy warms the earth's surface, which then emits heat energy back toward space. This outgoing radiation is partially trapped by greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane and water vapour, warming the earth's surface and atmosphere. Without these greenhouse gases the earth's average surface temperature would be about 33°C cooler. Human activities such as deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels have increased the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Groundwater: is that water which occurs or moves, seeps, filters, or percolates through the ground under the surface of the land.

Hydrology: the science concerned with the occurrence of water on and in the earth.

Invertebrate: an animal without a backbone, such as insects, worms, snails, mussels, prawns and cuttle-fish. A **macroinvertebrate** is an invertebrate greater than 0.5mm in length.

Litre (L): is the volume of water in a cubic decimetre or one-thousandth of a cubic metre. It is approximately one kilogram. As an example, we can buy a litre of milk in a carton. **Kilolitre (kL)** is one thousand litres or one cubic metre of water. It weighs about one tonne. **Megalitre (ML)** is one million litres or one thousand cubic metres of water (about one thousand tonnes). According to FINA, an Olympic Swimming pool is at least 50 metres by 25 metres with a minimum depth of 2 metres, making it at least 2,500 cubic metres or 2.5ML. The Sydney Aquatic Centre competition pool is 51.5 metres by 25 metres with a depth of 2 metres to 3 metres, making it approximately 3.2ML. **Gigalitre (GL)** is one thousand million (or one billion) litres of water or one million cubic metres (about one million tonnes). According to Waterways NSW, Sydney Harbour holds 503,786ML of water or just over 500GL.



figure 124 - Sydney Harbour - just over 500GL of water (News Ltd)

Median: the middle value of a set of numbers.

Orographic effect: occurs when moist air is forced upwards by a barrier of mountains or hills. Cloud formation and rainfall is often the result.

Organic farming: is a holistic production management system that promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It emphasises the use of management practices in preference to the use of off-farm inputs such as artificial fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides.

Perennial: a plant that lives for three or more seasons.

Permaculture: extends the concept of organic farming to a system of design for sustainable living (permanent + agriculture). It is the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive



figure 125 - The competition pool at Sydney Aquatic Centre (News Ltd)

ecosystems which have the diversity, stability and resilience of natural ecosystems. It is the harmonious integration of landscape and people providing their food, energy, shelter and material and non-material needs in a sustainable way.

Permeable: a surface that allows liquids and gases to pass through.

Recharge area: an area where water is absorbed to be added to a body of water, such as groundwater or a lake.

Reservoir: a natural or artificial pond or lake used for the storage and regulation of water.

Reverse osmosis: is a process that uses a membrane under pressure to separate relatively pure water (or other solvent) from a less pure solution.

Riparian zone: that part of the landscape adjacent to a water body, that influences and is influenced by watercourse processes. It is commonly used to include the in-stream habitats, bed, banks and sometimes floodplains of watercourses.

Runoff: the portion of precipitation (rain, hail, snow) that flows across the land surface and does not soak into the ground.

Salinity: the accumulation of salts in soils, soil water and groundwater. Changes in water balance cause **dryland salinity**. Removal of vegetation and the replacement of trees with shallow rooted vegetation (crops) reduces the use of water in the soil, causing the watertable to rise bringing with it salt to the surface. **Irrigated salinity** is when watering of crops leads to an increased recharge of water in the soil, and a rising watertable. **Urban salinity** arises from practices such as septic tank use, sewerage and drainage systems, excessive watering of gardens and lawns, clearing native vegetation and infrastructure development altering surface drainage patterns.

Saltmarsh: areas, vegetated by herbs, grasses or low shrubs, bordering salt water bodies.

Stratiform: also known as stratus clouds, appear as light grey clouds that look like even sheets and cover all or part of the sky. They are composed of fine water droplets that become larger as they collide with each other and are often very low in the air.

Stream flow and Base flow: water flowing in a creek, called stream flow, can be subdivided into flow contributed by surface runoff and flow contributed by groundwater discharge through the bed of the creek, known as base flow. Base flow may keep a river from drying up completely in drought times and may be vital to the character and composition of ecosystems.

Subsidies: monetary assistance granted by a government to a person or group.

Sustainability: is an imprecise concept that brings in the idea of maintaining indefinitely what we're doing without compromising the environment, our economy or society. It makes us think about what we're leaving our grandchildren and is very closely related to ecologically sustainable development.

Sustainable flow is the flow that can be sustainably diverted from surface water. **Sustainable yield** is the flow that can be sustainably extracted from groundwater.

Topography: the detailed description and analysis of the features of a relatively small area, district or locality.

Turbidity: a measure of the murkiness of water, reflecting the amount of sediment in the water.

Vermiculture: The raising and production of earthworms for the creation of organic fertiliser.

Virtual Water: is the amount of water that goes into growing, making or creating something. So when we buy fruit and vegetables, in a sense we are also buying the water that went into growing them. Professor JA Allan from the University of London first coined the term in 1995.

Watercourse: a river, creek or stream; could also include a channel or a ditch

Waterlogging: the permanent or temporary saturation of the soil profiles so as to impede plant growth.

Watertable: a point below which the soil is saturated with water.

Weirs: small structures that form a barrier across a stream or river so that water collects behind it.

Wetlands: described in the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance as areas of permanent or periodic/intermittent inundation, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tides does not exceed 6 metres.

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While all the internet references mentioned here were available over the 5 months when we were writing this book, the internet is constantly changing and these sites may not be available as you read this. For your convenience we have included some of the key references on the Hunter Water Australia site at www.hwa.com.au.

More efficient use of water

Stop the leaks in the Great Artesian Basin

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