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SUBMISSION ON *WATER FOR THE FUTURE – STRIKING THE BALANCE* (DRAFT ACT WATER STRATEGY 2013)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft ACT water strategy 2013 *Water for the Future – Striking the Balance*. I make the following submission in my capacity as a private citizen of the ACT.

Broad comments

I congratulate the authors of the draft strategy for their efforts. *Water for the Future – Striking the Balance* is by and large a strategic and comprehensive document. There are only a couple of significant elements that need to be added and a few more minor adjustments that need to be made in order for the document to be a fully comprehensive strategy for the future.

One missing element

Any water strategy needs to cover all aspects of water. The draft strategy has made a good attempt at this but has focused on water above the ground surface. As a result it has missed a significant water resource: the water below the ground surface.

Groundwater is a major resource and is vital for the health of vegetation on the stability of buildings and roads. In turn, vegetation (particularly trees) makes an important contribution to the ACT's liveability and can play an important role in making mitigating the effects of climate change and reducing energy consumption.

Groundwater was severely depleted during the last drought and is still recovering. It is the main element that still needs to be addressed in the draft strategy, and its use is discouraged.

Community partnership

One of the COAG principle is used to 'adopt a partnership approach so that stakeholders are able to make an informed contribution to urban water planning, including consideration of the appropriate supply/demand balance' and the vision for the draft strategy includes 'a community working together'.

This partnership is recognised in some parts of the draft strategy but not others. It needs to be recognised explicitly and systematically throughout the strategy. Only in that way can the partnership and the success of the strategy be realised.

Furthermore, the community contributes to the ACT's water supply through the provision of water tanks. This contribution also needs to be explicitly recognised in the strategy.

Some other specific adjustments needed

Foreword

Para 7: notes that 'climate change persists'. Climate change will actually worsen in the foreseeable future, particularly with the current lack of worldwide efforts to address the problem. This needs to be reflected in the Foreword and throughout the strategy.

1. A sustainable water strategy

The key drivers (section 1.2) are well thought out but require adjustments to the following dot points along the following lines:

- adopting a fully integrated approach to ~~catchment and water resource management~~ management of the ACT's catchments and groundwater and its water resources
- preparing for and responding effectively to climate change, population growth and land use change.

These changes need to flow through to the rest of the strategy.

The outcome for Theme 1 (Environmental water and urban waterways) needs to include ensuring:

- good quality of water entering ACT water storages
- ground water in the ACT is of good quality and quantity

The outcome for Theme 3 (People, public health and recreation) needs to reflect a whole-of-government approach: safe and clean water should be available for anyone who lives in, works in or visits Canberra, not just Canberrans.

3. Strategies for achieving outcomes for water

One thing that affects all three themes is our reliance upon using water as a carrier of sewage to centralised sewage treatment plants, whereafter the treated effluent is discharged into the Murrumbidgee. The ACT could make a significant difference to its water consumption and to the water quality of our downstream neighbours by changing how we deal with sewage. This could be achieved by a move to decentralised sewage treatment, particularly through use of composting toilets. I suggest that the strategy be amended accordingly.

3.1 Theme 1 – Environmental water and urban waterways

Under Strategy 2 (establish, attain and maintain water quality standards for all ACT water bodies), I welcome the proposed action to establish clear social, economic and environmental values for all watercourses in the ACT. I suggest, however, that the action be placed first in the list because from that all other actions flow.

I was surprised to see no mention of wetlands, particularly given:

- community involvement in development and management of several ACT wetlands and
- that Jerrabomberra Wetlands is ‘one of the most valuable wetland habitat areas in the ACT, and of national and international importance’.¹

I suggest that an extra activity be included to reflect the ongoing management needed to ensure the ongoing amenity and function of the wetlands.

3.2 Theme 2 – Water supply and meeting demand

I suggest that 'meeting demand' be changed to 'managing demand'. Demand should not be unlimited, and this is reflected in strategy 7 (*manage* water usage...).

Conclusion

I am happy to discuss these comments further, particularly specific changes to explicitly deal with groundwater, community partnership and planning for worsening climate change (and the few typographical and editorial errors I found).

Gillian King

¹ http://www.tams.act.gov.au/parks-recreation/parks_and_reserves/canberra_nature_park/jerrabomberra_wetlands viewed 30 August 2013