

National Water Initiative and Northern Australia

Ken Matthews
Chairman and CEO
National Water Commission

The National Water Commission – Roles:

Drive **national** water reform

1. Advance the COAG National Water Initiative
2. Advise on, and administer, the Australian Government Water Fund

Tropical Australia – what's different?

- Highly seasonal rainfall
- Higher levels of run-off (65% of Australia's run off flows from Gulf of Carpentaria, Timor Sea, and North-East Coast drainage divisions)
- Lower intensity of water extraction
- Higher proportion of less disturbed systems
- Isolated/inaccessible catchments
- Higher proportion of indigenous land ownership
- Some irrigation developments in place – eg Daly River, and opportunities for more

Challenges in Water Planning in Northern Australia:

1. How to acquire knowledge of how northern rivers work.
2. What are the ecological, economic & other public benefit outcomes to be planned and managed for?
3. How to plan with very low population densities.
4. How to involve indigenous stakeholders in planning.
5. Who represents production interests when there is no production?
6. How to plan across state borders.
7. Despite differences from the north, can lessons be learnt from southern Australia?

Water Management in Northern Australia:

Water management based on:

- Improving our knowledge of water systems in northern Australia such as patterns in water availability and recharge, connectivity of surface and groundwater, and ecological relationships
- making knowledge based and consultative water management decisions including in planning, entitlements, investment and management, and
- balancing future development opportunities with the protection of northern Australia's water resources for environmental or cultural purposes:

- such as by identifying water systems of high conservation value, and managing them to protect and enhance those values; and
- by learning new production systems appropriate to the north.

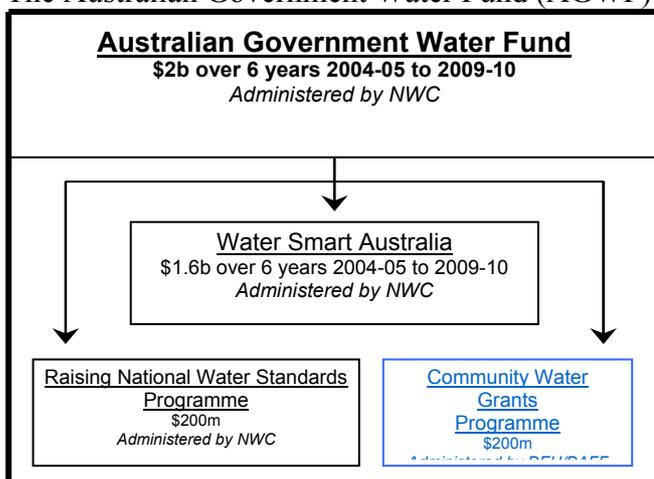
The National Water Initiative – across Australia:

- Prepare water plans with provision for the environment
- Allocate tradeable water entitlements
- Assign risks of changes in water availability
- Deal with interceptions of water flows
- Introduce registers of water rights and standards for water accounting
- Deal with over-allocated or stressed water systems
- Reduce barriers to interstate water trade
- Improve pricing for water storage and delivery
- Meet / manage urban water demand

What's in the NWI for Northern Australia?

- provides frameworks for managing production, environmental and other interests in water
- establishes water access entitlements that provide
 - security for water users
 - secure water for environmental and public benefit outcomes
(at least the same security as water for consumptive use)
- commits governments to identify required knowledge
- commits governments to planning and capacity building
- recognises the need to identify water systems of high conservation value and to manage these systems to protect and enhance those values
- provides for indigenous access to water resources including for social and customary objectives
- recognises the connectivity between surface and groundwater resources and the need to manage them as a single resource
- A contribution to the necessary costs is available

The Australian Government Water Fund (AGWF):



Raising National Water Standards:

The programme will invest in Australia's national capacity to measure, monitor and manage its water resources. It will support:

- improved conservation of water systems with high environmental values – many of which are in northern Australia - through measures such as improved knowledge, planning, and voluntary conservation agreements
- a nationally consistent system for collecting and processing water data
- national frameworks for good water management
- strategic assessment of groundwater resources and connectivity with surface waters

Likely to include an investment strategy for northern Australian water systems.

In Conclusion:

- The National Water Initiative and the National Water Commission are for all of Australia.
 - The world is watching what we do in the north.
 - We need to understand northern rivers and northern agriculture. \$ will be required for this knowledge.
 - The NWI is neither inherently brown nor green.
 - But it gives frameworks for decision making, long term planning and sustainable water management to meet both green and brown objectives
- *appropriate to northern circumstances.*