

December 14, 2006: AusSMC Briefing on 2006 – A year of drought

Jenifer Simpson Industrial Chemist, Author and Educator on water issues

Bio Note

Jenifer became interested in water management issues in 1992 and was struck by the profound lack of understanding in the community of this basic, essential and precious part of our lives. She has travelled widely to find out how water is managed in various parts of the world.

Jenifer served on the Australian Water Association's Queensland Branch Committee for more than ten years. She was invited to join the committee after she wrote a booklet called *Dinosaur Technology Syndrome*. Her role on the committee has been to help to forge links between AWA and the broader community and raise awareness of water management issues.

In a voluntary capacity she was the principle author of the AWA's water education kit, *We All Use Water*. Her most recent publication is *From Waste-d-water to Pure Water*, about the water quality Star Rating System.

As Project Officer for Water Management Issues for the Sunshine Coast Environment Council, she is involved in water management issues in her local community.

Abstract

Drought: an unprecedented opportunity for change

We have long since known that changes are needed to the way we manage water in our cities but reforms have not kept up with our expanding urban footprint. Now, with the unprecedented drought, we are faced with the real prospect of running out of water – the situation has become urgent.

Our current urban water cycle is a straight line from dam to disposal with a shortage of water at one end and pollution at the other. We have previously looked at all the different parts of this line in isolation from each other but our water plans should be integrated, long-term and regional.

Although we have the technology and the expertise to make the required changes, we are inhibited because of communication difficulties between the water industry and the community. The community has very little knowledge of water quality and the water professionals do not have adequate words to be able to explain it. The terminology we use conveys negative associations and images. Water quality issues have the potential to form strong, negative headline material, which has great attraction to the media – it is easy for them to take advantage of the knowledge vacuum to generate hysterical headlines that sell newspapers.

Change is also inhibited by the short-term vision of our political decision-makers and a huge amount of capital invested in water infrastructure.

Contact: Australian Science Media Centre
PO Box 237
RUNDLE MALL SA 5000
Ph: 08 8207 7415 | Fax: 08 8207 7413 | Email: info@aussmc.org | Web: www.aussmc.org