

## National Urban Water R&D Needs and Capability Forum Communiqué (from the Australian Water Research and Development Coalition)

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An historic national round-table forum held in Canberra on Wednesday 26 September discussed future urban water research and development (R&D) needs and ways to improve Australia's processes for planning and delivering urban water R&D.

Hosted by the National Water Commission and other members of the Australian Water Research and Development Coalition, this Forum was attended by over thirty invited participants representing all levels of government, water authorities, private sector water industry, university researchers, CSIRO, the new Cooperative Research Centre for water sensitive cities and state and national water research organisations.

While significant investments have recently been made by all levels of government to secure urban water supplies in major metropolitan regions, and to improve the environmental management of wastewater and stormwater runoff, the forum noted that future management of water in cities and towns, including rural and remote communities, remains vulnerable to pressures of population growth, climatic variability and increased call upon our limited water resources from all sectors of the economy. Recognising these emerging needs, and that more integrated urban water management will be required in the future, the forum concluded that continued research leading to the development of new and innovative solutions is going to be required into the future. Unlike many of the recent infrastructure investments made by governments, future solutions for cities and towns won't necessarily be readily implemented with existing technology and systems.

Some key emerging challenges for urban water management discussed at the workshop that will require ongoing development of practical solutions include (not in any order):

- achieving liveable and water sensitive and cities, including regional, rural and remote communities
- improving community and customer engagement
- managing integrated systems, including future combinations of large centralised and smaller decentralised water supply and treatment systems
- delivering efficiency and productivity (economic and technical) and containing urban water prices
- ensuring effective industry engagement, including enabling Australia-based firms to leverage internationally off Australia's strengths in water management
- ensuring effective and efficient regulatory arrangements (health, environment, economic and urban planning)
- ensuring water quality and safety
- managing extreme events including flooding.

This national forum was the first of its type. It broke new ground in bringing together all the sectors that need to be involved in identifying and prioritising national urban water needs, researching, developing and implementing practical solutions. Participants agreed that, while Australia's urban water research and development needs have generally been met to date, there would be mutual benefits to all stakeholders if a more collaborative approach to R&D by all sectors can be achieved. Participants asked for work to be done to improve and streamline the processes for planning and delivering urban water research.

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Participants agreed there was considerable value in the forum and that discussions and collaborative planning should continue. Several important initiatives were identified as desirable for implementation over the next 9 months to mid 2013.

### The 10 Point Implementation Plan

1. Form a Partnership Working Group, representative of all stakeholder sectors, with an independent Chair, and hosted by the National Water Commission. It was agreed the working group coordinate of a number of initiatives (refer following), each led and supported collaboratively by representatives from the various sectors that participated in the forum. The working group will meet by November 2012 to progress arrangements for each initiative.
2. Prepare a report on the outcomes of the forum and submit an *Urban Water Needs and Capability Forum Report* to government, utility, private enterprise and research sectors.
3. Maintain *regular contact with all parties involved in urban water research* including the group of government officials that will be taking forward the COAG-commissioned work on urban water R&D.
4. Prepare for discussion a draft *Statement of National Urban Water Research and Development Challenges and Priorities* – based on the respective urban water research planning strategies and processes of each of the sectors involved.
5. Explore options for improving and streamlining the processes for planning and delivering urban water research in Australia.
6. Progress the development of a *National Urban Water Information and Knowledge Management and Adoption Strategy*.
7. Linked to an effective approach to information and knowledge management and adoption (action #6), share and exchange approaches to evaluation of R&D initiatives, including return on investment assessment criteria.
8. Commence planning for a *National Urban Water Symposium* (to be convened most probably in late 2013 or 2014) aimed specifically at enhancing the interaction between research providers and research users and beneficiaries (public and private sectors).
9. Develop an analysis of the needs and interests of Australian industry in urban water R&D, including opportunities for advancing national industry productivity and international trade and investment.
10. Re-convene a second, national multi-sector Forum in mid 2013.

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