

Media Release

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Climate change threatens Australia's water security

The threat of climate change and its impact on water management is a growing concern for the Australian water sector, according to a joint study released today by the Australian Water Association (AWA) and Deloitte at AWA's first National Leadership Summit. The *State of the Water Sector 2010-15* presents the views of almost 1200 people working in and closely associated with the water sector.

"87 per cent of respondents working in the water sector feel that climate change is a moderate or significant threat to the sustainable management of water. Less than two per cent feel it is no threat," Tom Mollenkopf, Chief Executive of the Australian Water Association said.

"That is a very clear message; climate change and water scarcity need to be better addressed to ensure water security for Australia's growing population."

The *State of the Water Sector 2010-2015* report showed that more than 62 per cent of respondents feel that the water sector overall is 'sound' or 'very sound', but there are some important challenges.

Asked to rank the key issues facing the sector, 42 per cent chose sustainability, followed by water security and water scarcity.

Report co-author and Deloitte water industry partner, Paul Liggins noted that, “These are all inter-related issues. But the fact is that in the face of a growing population, a drying environment and the need to restore degraded ecosystems they are difficult to achieve. While 55 per cent of respondents feel that water security is being managed well, only 41 per cent feel similarly about water scarcity and only 25 per cent feel sustainability is being well managed.

Mr Liggins said that it is encouraging that the sector recognises the work that has been done to achieve a secure water supply through the diversification of supply options. But sustainable water services can only be achieved if all levels of government work together and if there is effective debate between governments, the water sector and the community.

“We need a whole of society response,” Mr Mollenkopf said. “Partisanship, grandstanding and mis-representation are not going to help us restore degraded environments, respond to the threat of uncontrolled climate change or pass on sustainable water services to future generations.”

The report also found clear support for adding recycled water into Australia’s water supplies and using stormwater as a source of supply.

Tom Mollenkopf said, “Recycled drinking water is an effective solution to Australia’s water demands and the water sector strongly supports this supply option. The sector has an important role in educating communities and building confidence about recycled water.”

Paul Liggins said, “The survey shows industry is also concerned about some aspects of regulation of the water sector. While 80 per cent of respondents consider that water quality

and health regulation is effective, more than 45 per cent thought that economic/price regulation was ineffective.”

According to Mr Liggins, “This is likely to reflect the fact that only in the ACT, NSW and Victoria is there full independent regulation of water prices. Regulatory arrangements in other states are less well developed and there is a clear need for other jurisdictions to lift their game in this regard.”

Urban vs. Rural

The survey explored the views on the relative performance of both the urban and rural water sectors. More than 62 per cent of respondents from the sector felt that urban infrastructure is being maintained well, but only 26 per cent feel similarly about rural water infrastructure.

The report is being presented at the AWA’s first Annual National Water Leadership Summit taking place in Canberra on Wednesday 17 November. The National Water Leadership Summit is a meeting of the highest level water industry practitioners, managers and planners. Speakers include Senator Don Farrell, Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water, Senator Barnaby Joyce, Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Water and Mr Fraser MacLeod, Executive Director, Basin Plan, MDBA.

About the survey

The AWA/Deloitte state of the water sector survey took place between August and October 2010 and was completed by 1,162 people who work in the Australian water industry. Nearly half (47%) of the respondents have worked in the sector for ten years or more. The respondents had a variety of roles and responsibilities and each state and territory was well represented.

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For further information:

Helen Ketton
Communications Manager
Mobile: 0401 806 277
Tel: +61 (0) 2 9467 8416
hketton@awa.asn.au

Johnny Sollitt-Davis
Communications manager
Mobile: 0407 269 305
Tel: +61 (0) 2 9322 7256
jsollittdavis@deloitte.com.au

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About AWA

The Australian Water Association is an independent and not-for-profit association for water professionals and organisations, providing leadership in the water sector through collaboration, advocacy and professional development. As Australia's peak water industry body, AWA has the largest – and most broadly based – membership, connecting professionals around the country and across all water-related disciplines.