7-20-2006

The Water Infrastructure Challenge in Victoria

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Abstracts of presentations given on Thursday, 20 July 2006, in session 31 of the UCOWR Conference.

THE WATER INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGE IN VICTORIA

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Water resources, and the infrastructure to sustainability manage these resources, are a priority for the Victorian State Government. Prolonged drought, projected population growth, combined with the potential impact of climate change and the economic importance of industry and agriculture to the economic prosperity of the State, emphasise the importance of investment in innovative and efficient water infrastructure systems.

Victoria's water infrastructure assets have a replacement estimate of more than $30 billion. Aging assets, losses from seepage and evaporation, and improvements in sewerage and treatment, are placing pressure on Victoria's water supplies. A societal wide consensus has emerged on the need to view water as a scare resource, and invest and legislate accordingly. Building more dams is not considered the solution, as dams simply take water from an existing source.

Finding solutions that meet both economic and environmental needs was identified as a key area for policy by the current Victorian Government when elected in 1999 and 2002. Irrigation and river health needs are being jointly addressed through cost-effective innovation, such as using channel automation technology, and recycling to free scarce water resources for enhanced environmental flows into stressed river systems such as the famous Snowy and Murray Rivers. Water market development, water allocation systems, integrated infrastructure and environmental planning can further address water issues for Victoria.

Victoria is leading change in thinking across Australia - through keynote policy and project initiatives.
In 2004, the Victorian Government released a White Paper, entitled *Our Water, Our Future*, identifying six priority areas and 110 actions to deliver water reform.

In addition the Victorian State Government has combined a substantial and ongoing financial commitment (close to $1 billion), with consistent public advocacy for innovative water-use practices.

Reform requires strong financial and political support, supporting a range of solutions tailored to the needs of all geographies. Technical and financial innovation are critical components, as is partnership between government and the private sector, in order to design and deliver infrastructure solutions meeting the developmental needs of stakeholders.

A key area of innovation in water resource planning at the State-wide level is the development of Regional Sustainable Water Strategies that aim to integrate the plans of water businesses and catchment management authorities that operate within each region of Victoria. The Sustainable Water Strategies will consider the total picture of water resource management in each region over the next 50 years. They will examine at all sources of water, including rivers, reservoirs and aquifers, as well as recycled water, stormwater and seawater. A range of water resource management issues and opportunities will be identified and options proposed to maintain and improve the condition of our rivers and to provide safe, reliable water supplies for all users.