

Draft - Communities of Practice Options Paper – Sustainable Water Challenge

Background

Participants at the Water Sensitive Cities (WSC) Workshops (2009) hosted by the National Water Commission and the International Water Centre held in the 5 major metropolitan cities (and attended collectively by over 500 practitioners) identified preferred priority actions to transition our cities to more water sensitive ones. Including:

- Creating supportive, institutional, sectoral environments (culture, commitment and support) as demonstrated by funding, incentives and collaboration and a coordinated institutional approach;
- Providing direction, vision and leadership for the WSC (eg. clarifying common understanding of what a WSC is) and how we can transition (regulation, policy and planning);
- Implementing a WSC by progressing on-ground 'true cost' alternative solutions, tools and methodologies and using demonstration projects within a continual learning-by-doing cycle;
- Sharing knowledge and raising awareness and skill across the sector and wider community for establishing interdisciplinary and cross sectoral approaches between stakeholders;
- Developing a collaborative and coordinated approach (sector and wider community) by improving communication and coordination within and between organisations, promoting a multi-disciplinary approach;
- Establishing a national network or forum.

These findings were similarly reflected in the Institute of Sustainable Futures (ISF) investigation (2009), *Barriers and Drivers to Sustainability in Local Government (NSW)* on behalf of the Urban Sustainability Support Alliance where council practitioners identified a preference for skill development training on a regional basis that engaged all council staff (not just sustainability practitioners), using methods of teaching via practical demonstration projects and a capacity building approach 'where you take a project and work through it'. That is:

- Solutions should not be one-size-fits-all given that each council faces different barriers and/or regionally specific issues and use divergent approaches to address them;
- The importance of negotiated inter-departmental solutions;

- Senior management buy-in;
- The value of informal contacts and connections with staff from other councils in developing solutions and the provision of opportunities to formulate inter-council linkages;
- Generate partnerships between and support from external agencies;
- Joint training and good information sharing.

These findings compliment the empirical understandings detailed in Brown and Farrelly's (2007) social research pertaining to the role of the individual and organisations in progressing more sustainable urban water management practices. Namely, four capacity spheres and the interplay between them - the individual practitioner (human resources) and their relationship within their organisation; with other organisations; and the regulatory rules and incentives (State and Federal legislation and policy) that govern them. That is, initiatives that build capacity in one sphere (e.g. Human resource), while beneficial, will not sustain long term benefits unless it builds capacity in all four spheres collectively - individual, inter and intra organisational and regulatory rules and incentives.

This proposal attempts to address these identified needs and preferences through the delivery of a capacity building model based on the Water Sensitive Urban Design in Sydney Program's Sustainable Water Challenge employed in 2003. Ensuring the translation of best management practice via multidisciplinary teams into on-ground works, while building regional (and potentially national) cross sectoral linkages in parallel with individual, organisational and regional capacity.

The event may be held annually in metropolitan regions via capacity building initiatives and in partnership with Development Corporations. Regionally, the events could be delivered via Catchment Management Authority's or their equivalents. Metropolitan utilities may also be engaged.

Modular in design, the project could be expanded or contracted depending on available funding and provides the opportunity to leverage off regional resources and other incentives such as resource tool kits, rebate programs and/or grant funding. Similarly, the events could be housed as information dissemination exercises, including Federal and State Government policy, program and other initiatives.

Objectives

Objectives of the project include, but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- Facilitating the establishment of individual, intra and inter organisational communities of practice within existing regulative frameworks;
- Aiding the identification and fostering of regional champions and leaders;
- Raising standards of Water Sensitive Urban Design and Integrated Urban Water Management via communities of practice while generating cross sectoral linkages between water practitioners;
- Promoting innovation, and building capacity in local government, the development industry and water utilities to implement sustainable forms of urban water management;
- Promoting more on-ground works / developments that adopt best practice water sensitive urban design;
 - Identifying new 'icon projects' each year, as well as gathering data (e.g. designs, costing, photographs, etc.) for inclusion on existing capacity building or other websites;
 - Publicly acknowledging the work of leading individuals and organisations promoting innovative and widespread transition to water sensitive cities;
 - Engaging senior management and councillors via an awards program;
 - Promoting friendly competition at the local level to help drive the transition to water sensitive cities.

Project Cost

A detailed budget has not been prepared for this project at this stage, rather, it is anticipated the cost would be factored during the scoping workshop. While the modular nature of the project's design would enable the project's scope and delivery to be based on regionally available resources, if a high level of engagement of Local councils Australia wide was to be secured, cost is expected to be reasonably high.

Project Partners

Depending on resource availability, the initiative may be delivered regionally and or replicated Australia wide. It is proposed that a scoping workshop is held nationally with all potential stakeholders to develop the preferred delivery model with regional replication in mind.

Proposed project partners and associated roles and responsibilities may include:

Organisation	Role and Responsibility
Capacity Building Program	Regional Project Manager – local councils (metropolitan)
Catchment Management Authority	Regional Project Manager – local councils (regional utilities)
Developer Corporation	Regional Project Manager – developers
Independent Consultants	Training Partner(s) – EOI Process Required
Stormwater Industry Association	Delivery Partner
National Water Commission	Award Program Facilitator
Other	Resource and Tool Development Partner – Case studies, lessons learnt, workshop guidelines, event report (summation of regional specific issues and proposed solutions).

Project Delivery

Dependent on the commitment from stakeholders, it is proposed the project be delivered in partnership and preferably in parallel Australia wide. While this is the preferred delivery model, there is no guarantee this is possible. A second option may be the delivery of a pilot project in Sydney and later replicated in the other regions around Australia.

Council practitioners have limited funds for capacity building. Experience suggests that in order to engage the lesser performing councils and who are less likely to fund capacity initiatives for their staff; the event should be held at a cost of no more than \$200 per participant or \$1,200 per council (excl. GST). In the very least, the event should be held at cost or subsidised where possible.

Another option to reduce costs and as adopted by the Water Sensitive Urban Design in Sydney Program (intends holding this event in 2010) may be to secure the pro bono services of regional consultants to facilitate the interactive workshop component.

Further, while it is considered this model could be better delivered over two days, the adverse impact this may have on attendance levels should be considered during the project's design. Practitioner input in particular should be sought in this regard. That is, with a maximum of 6 participants attending per organisation it may be difficult to secure attendance beyond 1 day.

The model has sufficient scope to allow for regionally specific stakeholder developmental needs and the preferred objectives and outcomes of participating organisations. For example, councils who wish to build council capacity around their staff's ability to generate projects that address receiving water quality health may wish to register a team who are interested in generating a riparian and stream rehabilitation project. Whereas, another, may wish to build council staff capacity on urban renewal and retrofit. This could be managed via the attendee registration process with trainers selected to deliver the workshop sourced in advance and based on attendee's needs. Similarly, hosting organisations would have sufficient scope to develop an agenda based on their own information dissemination needs and wants.

Project Scope

It is proposed that a scoping workshop is held nationally with all potential stakeholders to develop the preferred delivery model with replication regionally in mind and in order to address all regional partner requirements and rather than retrospectively trying to stretch the delivery model to suit regional stakeholder needs.

Seminar (Individual Knowledge)

The Seminar component of the event would be an opportunity to disseminate best practice information while addressing regionally specific knowledge gaps and identified deficiencies preventing the uptake of water sensitive urban design. For example, best practice rain garden or natural channel design; getting a project from 'funding to fruition'; or implementation and adoption of a council's integrated urban water management policy framework (Legislative and Policy tools – Stormwater Targets, Design (council and developer) Guideline, Standard Drawings, Incentives (council and private development)) etc.

Similarly, the event may be used to disseminate nationally and regionally specific information about regulative requirements and/or available resources (e.g. grant funding programs), incentives (e.g. rebates) and available tools and resources (training, guidelines etc.). Further, the event could be used to generate partnerships between and support from external agencies (State and Federal); reinforcing the value of resource sharing, joint training and good information sharing identified as 'enablers' in the ISF Sustainability focussed (Barriers and Drivers) interviews with NSW councils (2009).

Interactive Workshop – Intra Organisational Capacity

The project would enable the development of regional networks of environmental practitioners, forming a sense of community and sense of place amongst practitioners within a singular organisation who often work in isolation. Further, the model leverages off the findings from the Transitioning to Water Sensitive Cities Workshops held in the major metropolitan regions Australia wide. In general terms, practitioners (more than 500 attendees) agreed that local government should link and integrate policy, planning and implementation, cooperating with other stakeholders, encouraging trial developments engage and educate the community and reinforce a new way of doing things.

An interactive and intensive capacity building initiative led by skilled trainers (and/or consultants) where a group of staff from local government authorities (e.g. engineers, planners, designers, operation and maintenance staff etc.) would work with trainers (or suitably qualified consultants / academics) in a workshop setting to progress a proposed WSUD development / project from the conceptual design stage through to the approval / construction stage.

Registration for attendance at the event could be used to coordinate this component and ensure that council teams had jointly developed (in general terms only) and sought senior management approval to develop the project scope at the event with a view to implementing the project on return from work.

A workshop of not more than 6 attendees per trainer is recommended and may therefore require considerable cost to deliver and unless trainers could be acquired pro-bono and as with the precedent set in the Sydney Metropolitan region using local consultants for an event scheduled in 2010.

Presentations – Inter Organisational Capacity

This component of the workshop would facilitate the inter-organisational linkages whereby, workshop participants would present their concept designs to their fellow practitioners and to receive feedback on concept design, determine opportunities to link their respective projects (where applicable) and other recommendations such as potential partners, additional available resources and lessons learnt from their own practical knowledge and experience in delivering similar projects and initiatives.

Monitoring & Evaluation – Organisational Champions (Attendees)

Based on the lessons learnt from the seminar and workshop modules as well as the translation of learnings from other attendees; this component of the workshop could utilise attendees identification of organisational barriers during the 'Interactive Workshop' component and develop strategic solutions to overcome them. Technical documents designed for this module could aid participants with assistance from trainers and could be based on *Chapter 10 – Management Strategies* of Taylor's (2008) *Leadership in Sustainable Urban Water Management*, industry report.

Participants would develop a set of commitments, which they could take back to their own organisation to implement as a group.

For example:

- Establishing a multi-disciplinary, inter-departmental working group, which meets regularly to further their organisation's commitment (including practical steps) to the uptake of water sensitive urban design;
- Strategies to identify and foster organisational champions;
- Strategies to adopt a best practice regulative framework (e.g. stormwater objectives and targets, design (council and developer) guideline, standard designs, incentives (council and private development etc.) ;
- Development of an internal capacity building program to foster the translation of best practice into capital and operational works.

Awards Program – Senior Management Buy-in/ Support

A national award scheme (could be virtual to reduce costs), highlighting the best examples of innovative WSUD and Integrated Urban Water Management (IUWM) practices around Australia and based on the conceptual designs delivered through the workshops. A condition of entry may be commitment for participating organisations to implement the project within 12 months as a further incentive to implement workshop projects. Entry into the awards program however, should not necessarily be a condition of registering for the workshop module.

An awards program aside from generating healthy competition at a regional and national level would also facilitate General Manager and Senior Management support and 'peer influence' for water sensitive urban design projects. Publicly acknowledging and highlighting the work of award winners and finalists each year.

Practical Tangible Tools and Resources

This component of the project and as with the other modules would be dependent on available resources. However, it would seem reasonable that this component could be held in consecutive years or in the very least, the first year of the event's inception.

Independent facilitators could be employed to record the findings from the workshop, including participant's views about perceived barriers and potential strategic solutions to overcome them. Similarly, regional barriers commonly identified should be formulated into a report and used as an advocacy platform for either progressing change (regulative) and/or garnering regional stakeholder support to collectively create change (behavioural – individual, organisational and regional).

Additional tools and resources that could be developed as a function of the project may be:

- Guidelines to provide technical assistance to all participants who wish to participate in the interactive workshop element of the program. The guideline may also be used as an online tool by practitioners outside of the project's delivery;
- An organisational commitment matrix for reference during the Monitoring and Evaluation module;
- Resourcing tool kits (e.g. Water for Life Program's Council Partnership Tool Kit (<http://www.waterforlife.nsw.gov.au/education/toolstips/partnershipkit>) to raise community awareness of government initiatives;
- Case Studies of award winning and/or finalist projects.

References

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Author's Note

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