

# "EcoForum"

Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2010

Australian Technology Centre, Sydney



## WAC Speaker's Notes

### A Brief History (Slide 1)

I would like to thank Steve Posselt for the opportunity to speak at today's Forum. There is quite a community-driven political storm brewing in South Australia. Governments have learnt very little from the election of the Rudd government, they have continued the arrogance of the Howard government and continued with the implementation of what are flawed market-driven policies into areas in which markets have no place. Water and the environment is but one of the areas being targeted. Communities throughout the length and breadth of the state are saying enough is enough.

### A Sustainable Water Future (Slide 2)

For far too long South Australia has struggled with being in the shadow of the eastern states. Too often it has allowed itself to be the fall guy. Allowing the British to test nuclear bombs at [Maralinga](#) in the 50's was unforgivable. We even have to remind our self from time to time that SA is Great! The introduction of an undemocratic institution called [COAG](#) in 1992, whose meetings are held in secret has further weakened the sovereignty of South Australia and effectively turned the State into a business unit of the Commonwealth. COAG has been central to implementing the religion of markets whether it makes sense or not.

The [Global Financial Crisis](#) exposed the folly of expecting that markets can be relied upon to act in our collective best interests when their primary motivation is self-interest of profit. That folly is behind Australian governments' single-minded focus on market-based solutions, irrespective of the consequences. The consequences of this folly are already too evident in South Australia.

### SA in Water & Environmental Crisis (Slide 3)

I've used the word crisis to emphasis that what has happened and continues to happen is all man-made. It is not the once in a 300 year drought that all State governments have used as a climate-change excuse to rush the building of desalination plants in all main land state capitals. They are needed to drive up the price of water to create healthy profit margins for private water suppliers irrespective of the economic consequences.

South Australian Governments since the 50's have been asleep at the wheel as diversions were dramatically increased from around 3,500 GL in 1950 to around 11,600 GL by 2000, a 331% increase. The natural median flow to the sea was around 13,900 GL. For decades South Australia has worked within a total diversion cap of 650 GL to cover town & urban water supplies, industry and irrigation use whilst the eastern states, particularly NSW continued to increase their diversions.

If the people of Adelaide were able to visual the devastation caused by the discharge of wastewater and stormwater into Adelaide Coastal Waters they would be horrified. Over 9,000 hectares of old-growth seagrass forests have disappeared and have been replaced by deserts open to erosion. The building of ill-conceived boat launching harbours and marinas, plus the use of dredging practices that pays little attention to coastal utility of our beaches compounds the problem.

It is this crisis that has contributed to the formation of the [Water Action Coalition](#). Community groups all over Adelaide are forming coalitions like never before for the March 20 state election.

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#### Mission (Slide 4)

Once we decided to form and launch WAC, considerable effort was put into planning; WAC Treatments or Logos were developed, a Charter, "A Call to Action" discussion paper and Brochure which detailed the members of the foundation committee, supporting organisations, International Patron Maude Barlow and Honorary Reference Group members. All this had to be agreed by the foundation organising committee, their organisations and be acceptable to our Supporting Organisations.

These documents form the foundation of our consistency of public message and can be downloaded by Googling "Water Action Coalition".

#### What's Been Happening (Slide 5)

The catalyst for the formation of WAC was the Community Water Summit held on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2009. A key part of this event was a community workshop which generated a lot of the ideas that have been carried forward to be implemented by WAC. This list of WAC events is also a tale of progress; the Community Water Summit was held in the Alan Scott Auditorium of the University of SA and was attended by around 150 people and one politician, David Winderlich who turned up in the afternoon and no media. WAC's [Big Water Debate](#) was held in co-partnership with The Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre at the same venue, attracted a full-house of around 400 people, many politicians and the event was reported in The Advertiser.

#### Organisational Model (Slide 6)

As some of you are aware my background is in engineering working in the Defence industry and these days I specialise in QA/QC working for my own company "Consultants in Quality Pty Ltd". This is the stuff that many people don't well understand; just ask Toyota who used to be pretty good at it. However understanding [Walter Shewhart's "Plan Do Check Act"](#) model is vital.

I guess what I am also trying to say is that WAC tries to stay on the same page as its member and supporting organisations. What has set it apart is that it has tried to take a systems view of the issues as a whole, works independently of its Supporting Organisations but gains some glue between the two by holding frequent campaign committee meetings.

A critical component in the achievement and professionalism of WAC has been the help of Richard Watson (Media Strategist), Gerben van der Hoek (Soup Creative) and Fernando M. Gonçalves (Film maker / Photographer) all professionals in their respective fields.

#### Challenges (Slide 7)

There are many challenges for WAC as this list testifies. However there is a key objective capable of unifying all community organisations campaigning on water and environmental issues right around Australia. That issue is to stop and reverse the privatisation of water itself and make privatisation of water and water services one of the key election issues in forthcoming state and federal elections. The kingdom of markets built by Hawke, Keating, Howard and now Rudd needs to come down to earth and get back to serving the people of this nation instead of global financial markets.

#### Recommendations (Slide 8)

When I look back over the past 12 to 18 months considerable progress has been made since I met with John Faulkner at the Hallett Cove Community Cabinet Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2008. At this

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meeting I handed over a paper "[Market Privatisation of the Murray-Darling](#)" which was subsequently published by [Fair Water Use \(Australia\)](#). These articles called for a Royal Commission and State of Emergency in the Murray-Darling Basin. Of course they were ignored and it signalled Labor had become a lost cause, it had stopped listening to its community and failed to question past policies made by COAG.

If we are to turn water reform around and make privatisation of water itself a key part of the federal election campaign it is vital that the eastern states establish WAC-like coalitions in their states / regions to challenge the status quo of the mass media and politicians. It is difficult for community organisations by themselves to challenge privatisation and to call for public inquiries.

There is a significant way to go before water privatisation and the market abuse of our water and our precious environments will be able to be turned around. A key to achieving this is to also turn around the big environmental groups who have allowed them to become wedded to market-based solutions to all manner of environmental problems.

Thank you all for listening and to finish, I wish to show you a few slides of WAC in action on the Steps of Parliament House on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2009.