

WATER USE AND CONSUMPTION

Australia's water environments are amongst our most valuable assets. Our unique rivers, wetlands, estuaries and coasts provide homes for many life forms, including plankton, fish, marine mammals and birds (including those that migrate here each year from around the world) as well as the many animals and humans that live near and frequent them. However, Australia is the driest inhabited continent on earth and yet Australians are still one of the highest water users in the world, with the average daily domestic water use being 350 litres per person (DEH).

Toxic or hazardous substances created from excessive or inefficient urban and agricultural activities are polluting some of our water supplies to such an extent that their environmental, social and economic benefits are seriously threatened. Wastewater treatment plants, urban run-off and other pollutants such as litter, illegal dumping and

pesticides continue to degrade our waters.

Healthy water is essential to sustain our communities, the environment and the economy. Without healthy water we would not be able to drink, grow and harvest food or undertake other activities that support us. We need to protect water environments whilst they protect and sustain us. However, this is not something that can be achieved by one person or organisation alone. Everyday, we all impact on water, and therefore we can all work together to better manage our actions through conservation.

References:

<http://www.deh.gov.au/water/urban/facts.html> -
Department of Environment and Heritage

WHAT CAN I DO?

■ The best approach to water conservation is to reduce water use, in turn reducing wastewater generation from households and businesses and reducing runoff from agricultural activities (taking into consideration that agricultural practices need to be placed in appropriate areas for any given crop's needs). By only using as much water as is necessary, less waste is created and more is left in the water source. There are many simple ways to conserve water in the home, such as planting water efficient gardens, installing a rainwater tank, taking shorter showers and installing water efficient (and therefore cost efficient) appliances. For example a standard showerhead uses about 20 litres of water per minute while a water efficient showerhead uses 6 or 7 litres per minute; a single flush toilet can use as much as 12 litres of water per flush but dual flush toilets require less than four litres (EPA Victoria). Buying products such as washing machines and dishwashers with a high water conservation rating is also a great way to reduce water consumption. Water Services Association of Australia is online at <https://www.wsaa.asn.au/ratings/ratingsabout.htm> and provides information on the National Water Conservation Rating Scheme.

■ Green Plumbers, at <http://www.greenplumbers.com.au/> is a nationwide service that provides a wealth of information and ideas on options for reducing water consumption, including greywater systems, as well as listings of green plumbers in your area.

MORE INFORMATION

- <http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/Students/Water/pollutants.asp> - EPA Victoria shows an informative list of water pollutants and what has caused them.
- <http://water.wri.org/> - global water issues explained by the World Resources Institute
- <http://www.waterrecycling.com/> - explains different ways to recycle wastewater
- <http://www.daff.gov.au/nwqms> - the Department of Agriculture, fisheries and forestry's National Water Quality Management Strategy
- <http://www.livingthing.net.au/> - click on 'saving water outdoors' for great ideas on reducing water consumption
- <http://www.sydneywater.com.au/SavingWater/> - a large range of info on water saving strategies