

19 February 2020

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Dear Dr Rawlings

### **NATIONAL CITIES PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK 3-YEAR REVIEW**

The Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) is pleased to provide feedback to the Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics (BITRE) on the National Cities Performance Framework (NCPF) 3-year review.

WSAA is the peak body that supports the Australian urban water industry. Our members provide water and wastewater services to over 24 million customers in Australia and New Zealand and many of Australia's largest industrial and commercial enterprises. WSAA is a member of the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC).

#### **We support the collection of indicators to provide a snapshot of performance across Australia's largest cities**

We support NCPF and its objective to provide data to help all levels of government, industry and community to make the best policy and investment decisions for Australia's future.

We suggest a clearer link between indicators, strategic objectives, priorities and programs, including City Deals. While City Deals are useful in encouraging councils and state and territory governments to consider their cities in an integrated way, we note there is no clear and current national Cities strategy, and the indicators could be used to inform one.

We acknowledge that longitudinal data to enable trend analysis and understanding of city performance over time is important. NCPF is framed around City Deals but indicators used across Australia are different and the local challenges are different. Ensuring that indicators are interpreted with local context in mind is important.

We support BITRE considering a broader range of indicators and data sources, and in particular indicators that more clearly address climate change impacts, extreme events, resilience and climate change adaptation.

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## **Cities benefit from the provision of safe drinking water and wastewater services by water utilities**

The water industry has always played a role in delivering liveability outcomes for cities by protecting public health and amenity through its core services involving:

- Safe, affordable and reliable supply of water to meet the needs of households, business and irrigated green space.
- Effective and affordable collection, treatment and disposal of wastewater, with human health and environmental benefits.
- Effective stormwater management<sup>1</sup> to protect waterway health and manage risks of floods to people and property.

We encourage BITRE to include indicators that acknowledge the important role of water and wastewater services in the performance of cities, in our view these roles contribute to the liveability of cities. We propose the following outcomes focused indicators for liveability (Issue 13):

### Drinking water quality

*Percentage of population where (microbiological and chemical) compliance with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines was achieved*

This type of indicator provides transparency and confidence in drinking water supplies. We note the Urban Water National Performance Report (produced by the Bureau of Meteorology) could be relied on as a data source for this proposed indicator (see indicators H3 and H4).

### Wastewater

*Beach health measurement*

*Swim-ability of waterways*

These metrics indicate the performance of wastewater management in a city, where wastewater is discharged to receiving environments (ocean or freshwater waterways). We note 'swim-ability of waterways' is a possible measure of the BITRE proposed Sustainability indicator 'River quality'.

Data on beach health is collected and available from several jurisdictions, including Beachwatch in NSW (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment), Beach Report in Victoria (EPA Victoria), Beach Alert (EPA South Australia) and similar local government programs in Tasmania.

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<sup>1</sup> Where water utilities have responsibility over stormwater management.

## **Cities benefit from water-enabled green and blue infrastructure**

In addition to our core services, the water industry continues to contribute to liveability, including maximizing the potential of water and land for green and blue infrastructure to deliver benefits to physical and mental health. Our recent work with Frontier Economics [Health benefits from Water Centric Liveable Communities](#) quantified up to \$94 per person per year of liveability related benefits attributed to integrated water management, including:

- \$28/person/year benefits from increased activity
- \$48/person/year increased wellbeing from exposure to green space
- \$14/person/year benefits from reduced urban temperatures
- \$4/person/year benefits from increased air quality.

More information about the contribution water utilities make to liveability is included in our paper [Blue + green = liveability: The value of water to liveable communities](#).

We encourage BITRE to include indicators that acknowledge the broad contribution water-enabled green and blue infrastructure makes to performance of cities, in our view these roles contribute to the liveability of cities.

We support the short-term indicator proposed by BITRE for canopy cover (we note this is included as a 'Sustainability' indicator; we suggest moving to the 'Liveability' category). In addition, we propose an indicator to measure irrigated green open space (Issue 13):

### Water-enabled green infrastructure

#### *Canopy cover*

#### *Irrigated green open space*

These metrics would provide an indication of the green infrastructure in a city and thus the liveability of that city. Further, these indicators would provide context to the proposed Sustainability indicator 'Water consumption'. Where a city values water for liveability outcomes, and seeks to adapt to a warming and drying climate, we can expect water consumption to be higher with subsequent liveability benefits related to physical and mental health, cooling and air quality. These indicators could also be used to provide information on a city's resilience and adaptation to climate change.

We are happy to discuss this submission further, please contact me on 0417 211 319 or email [adam.lovell@wsaa.asn.au](mailto:adam.lovell@wsaa.asn.au).

Kind regards



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