



WATER SERVICES
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



WSAA SUBMISSION

Senate Inquiry into the UN Sustainable
Development Goals (SDG)

March 2018



Response to Senate Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) is pleased to provide a submission to this inquiry.

WSAA is the peak body that supports the Australian urban water industry. Our members provide water and sewerage services to over 20 million customers in Australia and New Zealand and many of Australia's largest industrial and commercial enterprises.

WSAA facilitates collaboration, knowledge sharing, networking and cooperation within the urban water industry. The collegiate approach of its members has led to industry-wide advances to national water issues.

A commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals by the urban water industry

WSAA supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. Our industry provides water, sanitation and stormwater services to over 20 million customers and understands that water is critical to sustaining life.

As providers of essential services, we want to see the realisation of Sustainable Development Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

We believe universal access to safe water and sanitation is key to creating a better future and we know there is more work to be done.

As an industry we will:

- 1) support and promote the 17 Sustainable Development Goals;
- 2) support and work with Governments and other agencies to increase the capability and capacity of our region to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6;
- 3) commit to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 within the scope of our operations.

Over 20 of our water utility members have pledged the above and some have also become signatories of the UN Global Compact. Others are still exploring what the Goals mean for their businesses.

Response to Terms of Reference

WSAA provides the following information relating to specific aspects of the Senate Inquiry:

a. The understanding and awareness of the SDGs across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community

- General Australian public awareness of SDGs is limited. Public awareness seems to be consistently lower across the globe when compared to businesses. A recent Global Reporting

Initiative (2015) identified a high level of awareness of SDGs amongst the business community (92%) when compared to the general public (33%).

In addition, there is ongoing confusion between the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals and a perceived lack of relevance for the latter.

WSAA and its member water utilities have recognised their role in raising awareness of the SDGs and is working to build understanding of the importance of advancing the Goals in the urban water sector.

- WSAA support the need for greater awareness of the Goals across all private and public sectors to understand the relevance within the Australian context and community. Broad support is necessary to build momentum and support for programs to reimagine possibilities rather than 'business as usual'.
- Many urban water programs and initiatives deliver greater benefit to the community when done in partnership with other stakeholders. These include, but are not limited to, programs that deliver community health benefits (e.g. choosing water over sugary drinks), environmental and wellbeing benefits (e.g. integrated water cycle management/water sensitive urban design), energy efficiency (e.g. co-generation helping to divert waste from land fill) and renewable energy generation. Conversations with our customers often explore the concepts embodied in the SDGs, if not explicitly calling out the SDGs.

A targeted national campaign would assist the industry in gaining community and customer support for activities to advance the SDGs. Broader engagement can leverage the commitment demonstrated by private sector, investment community and civil society in progressing the Goals.

b. The potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDGs

Benefits:

- The SDG framework provides an opportunity and platform for utilities, government, regulators and the community to engage in a conversation to guide priorities. The SDGs are also a lens to identify business opportunities and partnerships. They provide a common language and set of goals that we can all work towards.

Through partnering and a shared vision, the opportunities for meeting future challenges and improved national outcomes are significant. The interlinkages between the Goals mean the benefits tend to be multipronged.

- Examples of activities that have led to improved social, economic and environmental outcomes are outlined in the WSAA paper [Global Goals for Local Communities](#). In addition, while not specifically mapped against the Global Goals, the case studies in [Next Gen Urban Water: The Role of Water in Vibrant and Prosperous Communities](#) also contribute to many of the Goals and provides several case studies that illustrate avoided costs, benefits and opportunities. For example:
 - A study by Deloitte indicated that the value attributable to coastal beach water quality – for Sydney residents alone – is in the order of \$137 million per year or a lifetime value of around \$2 billion. More information is available [here](#). (Contributing to SDGs 3,6,8,11,14,17)

- The installation of waste to energy plants by Yarra Valley Water, SA Water and Sydney Water provide a great opportunity for multiple benefits – keeping organics out of landfill, providing a clean source of energy and delivering cost benefits. (Contributing to SDG 6,7,11,12,13,15,17)
- Diversity and inclusion plans such as the [Thriving Communities Partnership](#) and [Tapping the Power of Inclusion and Diversity in Urban Water](#) have had multiple benefits for the community. (Contributing to SDGs 1,5,6,8,10,17)

Opportunities:

- In a world more interconnected than ever Australia has an interest in supporting and building capacity in neighbouring countries.
 - Australian utilities are in a unique position in the Asia Pacific region to share water experience and expertise. This includes policy development and governance arrangements through to skills and technology transfer, to on ground solutions.
 - Utilities have a strong role in delivering training and strengthening key institutions to improve water resource management throughout Australia and the adjoining Asia Pacific region.

Examples of this include:

- The Water Operators Partnership, funded by DFAT through the Australian Water Partnership: through this program, Australian utilities are helping build capacity to improve the asset management skills for the water industry in Kathmandu.
 - Sydney Water are partnering with South Pacific Water Utilities to help build resilience through climate change adaptation.
 - The Australian Water Association and WSAA members are engaged in twinning arrangements in Vietnam to roll out water innovation programs.
- The benefits of these programs include:
 - building resilience for disaster management through water infrastructure improvements
 - efficient water use in particular irrigation systems in the Australian food bowl and through South East Asia directly contribute to food security and alleviating poverty
 - the delivery of sanitation to improve quality of life in particular alleviating burden on women in developing countries
 - opportunities to reduce the impacts of high level consumption/resource use
 - opportunities to influence supply chain impacts
 - opportunities for more recycling and re-use of water as well as optimisation of chemical usage.

Costs:

With appropriate funding and resourcing, the urban water industry recognises that the SDG framework can provide common ground to achieve more such as:

- Identifying gaps and opportunities by looking at activities through an SDG lens
- Influence management of global supply chains
- Data to drive evidence-based decision making
- Contribute to inclusive and sustainable economic growth

- Partnering with local communities to drive sustainable production and industry and consumptive patterns
- Supporting vulnerable members of the community through financial hardship programs
- Provide a focus on multiple objectives to achieve sustainable development and avoid negative trade-offs – meeting the SDGs does not always have to be about more investment, but rather, about different investment
- Improve outcomes for our remote and indigenous communities.

c. What governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDG that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes

WSAA supports a global framework to drive action towards common goals. WSAA also supports a whole of government coordinated approach with local and state strategies supporting and supported by a federal level framework. Alignment of national initiatives e.g. the National Water Initiative needs to be seen as package, rather than siloes.

Governance structures supporting the implementation of SDGs, and in particular SDG 6, should be based on strong leadership with the following elements:

- links with national processes and structures, incorporating into an overarching national framework and supported by policy (e.g. water priorities aligned with national budget and investment plans and reporting mechanisms)
- investing in capacity; allocating roles and responsibilities within government and key water agencies
- informed by a baseline gap analysis on SDG priorities to align with investment plans
- delivering knowledge platforms, education, training and capacity building targeting water leaders
- clearly communicate what is and is not feasible within the national context and a certain timeframe, to manage expectations
- a consistent use of language incorporating the SDGs into corporate vocabulary.

To ensure appropriate governance and oversight of activities and progress against all the Goals, the Federal Government should report on the progress towards the Goals. This would ensure all activities and progress is captured particularly where different government departments have oversight over specific goals.

d. How can performance against the SDGs be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia's performance by civil society

WSAA supports:

- a national, open source data base on agreed indicators meaningful for Australia
- a coordinated approach
- national targets backed up with funding and resources to achieve
- State based indicators to assist driving actions that may be more tangible for the community

A coordinated communication effort would assist in fast-tracking understanding and the need for action beyond business as usual. Case studies of best practice can help to demonstrate how to create tangible outcomes through the examples given below:

- 1 *Water investment and planning priorities based on a whole of government materiality/gap analysis at policy level*
 - In order to accurately assess progress towards the goals and to identify key priorities for action, it is necessary to first establish a baseline depicting the current national situation on water management.
 - Comparative and gap analyses can also provide useful information on weaknesses and challenges for implementation, including gaps in the existing strategies and policy measures.
- 2 *Integration into government mechanisms and policy plus coherent participatory mechanisms in place to allow for:*
 - Better coordination of government initiatives delivering on SDGs.
 - Support and resources for water business.
 - Improving business progress reporting.
 - Engaging the private investment sector.
- 3 *A national monitoring and reporting process and knowledge sharing platform and improving both the spatial and temporal resolution of data.*
 - Australia has a long history of lagging on reporting disjointed reports lacking a centralised repository. National Reporting is segregated (e.g. sustainability reporting on social issues is separate and administered separately from environmental reporting). A centralised reporting platform would also constitute a tangible demonstration of sustainable and responsible behaviours by government agencies.
- 4 *A shared data repository for performance on SDG 6.*
 - There is a wealth of information collected by water utilities, such as that used for management and regulatory purposes, as well as corporate social responsibility performance reporting, which may be useful for national level monitoring on SDG 6.
 - Universities and research institutes may gather data for research purposes and thus may have both data and monitoring infrastructure to share, and they may also be able to support capacity building.
- 5 *Monitoring efforts in other sectors can offer synergies to water and sanitation monitoring, such as:*
 - household surveys can be expanded to include more questions about water and sanitation,
 - health records can provide indications on drinking water and sanitation,
 - smart meters for water can be installed together with the smart metering of other types of basic infrastructure,
 - Performance needs to be measured and monitored.

e. What SDGs are currently being addressed by Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) program

The Australian Government will deliver a new fund under Australia's aid program (Water for Women Fund). Source: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, Water, sanitation and other initiatives (accessed March 2018). The program will invest \$110.6 million over five years to improve the health, gender equality and well-being of Asian and Pacific communities through inclusive, sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programs. The initiative is part of Australia's commitment to the High Level Panel for Water.

Based on an overview of the Water for Women Fund, this initiative will directly contribute to SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation and support a number of other SDGs, in particular:

- 6 SDG 2: Zero Hunger
- 7 SDG 5: Gender equality
- 8 SDG 9: Industry innovation and infrastructure
- 9 SDG 17 : Partnership for the goal
- 10 SDG 10 : Reduced inequalities

f. Which of the SDGs is Australia best suited to achieving through our ODA program, and should Australia's ODA be consolidated to focus on achieving core SDG

The SDGs are interconnected, each goal has the potential to support and contribute to others so any program needs to be viewed as a package. WSAA supports the idea of using the SDGs as a framework to prioritise funding.

The Australian water industry has leading knowledge, skills and experience in relation to SDG 6 with less developed countries. Adequate resourcing and funding could see existing capacity building programs expanded.

SDG 6 is a strong enabler of other Goals. *"Water is seen as a critical prerequisite for the achievement of many of the SDGs. Outcomes in health, the environment, education, poverty reduction and sustainable agriculture, for example, cannot be achieved unless the water goal SDG 6 is also achieved. Achieving SDG 6 will reduce conflict, it will reduce poverty, in every sense it will enhance our natural environment, in every sense it will make the world a better place,"* Tony Slatyer, Special Advisor for the High Level Panel for Water for the Australian Government.

g. Examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDG from which Australia could learn.

Czech Republic

- The sustainable development agenda is coordinated at the national level by the Government Council on Sustainable Development (GCSD), chaired by the Prime Minister.

- Work on the strategic framework *Czech Republic 2030* started in 2015 and has been carried out in cooperation with hundreds of experts and stakeholders gathered in the GCSD and its nine thematic Committees.
- Analysis of the relevance of the SDGs in the national context shows that all the SDGs and most of the targets of the 2030 Agenda are applicable at the national level.
- While none of the SDGs have been fully accomplished, each goal contains areas where the Czech Republic scores well and which can be considered as strengths. Examples of such strengths and weaknesses (i.e. targets where progress has not been satisfactory) are showcased in each key area in order to provide a balanced and a deeper insight into the current state of implementation of selected SDGs.

Estonia

- Estonia's sustainable development principles have been determined by the National Strategy on Sustainable Development, *Sustainable Estonia 21*.
- The strategy basics are derived from the Law on Sustainable Development. This Act sets out regulations on sustainable use of natural environment and natural resources.
- This constitutes as a strategy for developing the Estonian state and society until 2030. The strategy was completed in close cooperation between the experts and the stakeholders. The adoption of the strategy was preceded by a thorough public discussion.
- The aim of the strategy is to combine the requirements for success arising from global competition with the preservation of the sustainable development principles and Estonia's traditional values. The National Strategy *Sustainable Estonia 21* proposes objectives and policies contributing to the sustainable development of Estonia.

The Kingdom of Netherlands

- The four countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands have chosen an ambitious approach to implementing the SDGs, building pragmatically on existing, relevant policies and institutions.
- They are currently integrating the SDGs into their development plans, thus ensuring continued action to achieve them. In January 2017, Aruba established a National SDG Commission consisting of representatives of the Ministry of General Affairs and the Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry, which is tasked with coordinating the implementation of the SDGs in Aruba. St Maarten is currently integrating the SDGs into its National Development Plan, which will focus on human development, good governance, environmental protection and the preservation of cultural heritage.
- Ensuring broad involvement and collaboration between different sectors is an ongoing challenge for all the countries of the Kingdom, and SDG implementation must be further aligned with each country's existing policies.

- In Curaçao all parts of society, from government to the private sector and young people, have embraced a vision that combines economic growth, environmental protection and the reduction of inequality. The country has integrated high-priority SDGs into its National Development Plan.
- In the Netherlands, responsibilities have been assigned to all the ministries concerned, with the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation in charge of overall coordination. A first national SDG report has been sent to parliament, drawing on a report by Statistics Netherlands, which is one of the first of its kind in the world.

Denmark & Norway

- In Denmark the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the launch of a national action plan for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by which “all relevant aspects of new Danish legislation will be assessed in relation to the Global Goals.”
- “Norway [have] a policy for development intended to serve as its contribution to the achievement of the SDGs.”

References:

- 1 [PwC Make it your business: Engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- 2 Global Reporting Initiative, [GRI contribution to sustainable development 2016-2020](#) (retrieved Jan 2017)
- 3 UK Parliament, [The Sustainable development Goals in the UK inquiry](#) (retrieved April 2017)
- 4 [United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge platform](#) (accessed March 2018)
- 5 UN Knowledge platform – Water, [G1- Monitoring water for SDG 6](#); Good practices for country monitoring systems (retrieved June 2017)
- 6 Source: Estonian Government Office – Sustainable Development (accessed February 2018)
- 7 <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/denmark-norway-announce-national-sdg-plans/> (Accessed March 2018)