

NATIONAL WATER COMMISSION FELLOWSHIP PROJECT:

Cross-Connections: Linking Urban Water Managers with Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Researchers

Research Fellow: Dr Zoë Sofoulis

This one-year project, funded by the National Water Commission, aims to facilitate knowledge exchange and strengthen connections between researchers from the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) sector and government and industry organisations involved in urban water and water services.

The social dimensions of sustainable resource management in urban Australia have to date received far less attention than technological and economic dimensions. Although natural resource managers and policymakers are increasingly aware that the success of sustainability and adaptation measures depends in part on social and cultural factors, few initiatives that address these dimensions have moved beyond the pilot stage. Instead, many resource managers either bypass human factors with technological fixes, or persist in addressing human factors in psychological rather than socio-cultural terms, proposing strategies to change people's 'attitudes' and manipulate pricing and other supposed drivers of consumption 'behaviour'.

This project is designed to help the water sector advance beyond such limited models by mobilising the expertise of HASS sector researchers in developing

strategies for adaptation and conservation that engage with ordinary people.

By making an inventory of recent innovative research projects and urban water-saving initiatives with a socio-cultural dimension, and by interviewing urban water personnel in the southern states about their approaches to residential water supply and demand, the first two stages of the research aim to take a snapshot of the water sector's current concerns about the social and cultural dimensions of water management and research, and to identify issues and obstacles to addressing social sustainability.

The second stage of the project involves holding workshops bringing people from government, industry and university sectors together to exchange ideas about previous and prospective collaborations, and to specify what kinds of resources and processes might be needed to improve chances of developing successful cross-sector partnerships for socially sustainable urban water management.

The final stage involves production of a resource document that will highlight opportunities for greater involvement of the HASS sector in water research and planning, outline uses for socio-cultural research, offer guidelines for cross-sector

partnerships, and propose new agendas for socially sustainable approaches to urban water.

The project's anticipated outcomes include greater confidence of water management organisations to enter into collaborations with the HASS sector, better understanding by HASS researchers of how to work more effectively with resource managers, and enhanced mutual appreciation of the value of different kinds of knowledge generated by methods and approaches from across the sectors.

Zoë Sofoulis and Research Associate Justine Humphry are keen to make contact with HASS researchers on urban water and allied topics, or any people in the water sector who are or have recently been involved in research projects or urban water-saving initiatives that address social and cultural factors.

This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H7875.

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