

Key Note Speaker:

### Mr Ken Matthews, CEO National Water Commission

I sometimes describe the National Water Initiative as being Australia's national blueprint for improved water management. So it should be no surprise that I strongly support the Water Stewardship Concept as a good opportunity for improved water management in Australia.

The National Water Commission (NWC) is unambiguously in favour of exploring the water stewardship concept here today. However we certainly would not wish to dictate any particular outcome from today. We would be keen to see a self-initiated outcome emerge from today's forum. I think that would clearly be in the national interest and I am sure would be supported by all governments in Australia.

I do suggest that we avoid today becoming design workshop for a future funding bid to governments. Nevertheless if a sensible water stewardship concept does emerge from today I suspect that resources could be found by governments to provide some start-up seed funding to help the concept develop and grow.

Why does the National Water Commission encourage exploration of the water stewardship concept here today?

- First, anyone would expect the NWC to be in favour of such a national initiative to improve water management;
- Second, if we are able to develop today a truly 'national' approach to water stewardship, that would be very consistent with the national approach to water management embedded in the 'national' water initiative;
- Third, the water stewardship concept as I understand the concept would build good water management into commercial operations right throughout the economy. In other words it harnesses market incentives to improve water management. In my experience market incentives are the most enduring way to change behavior;
- Fourth, the water stewardship concept engages the private sector in improved water management. Too often, water is seen as just the business of governments and in my view this is both myopic and wrong ;
- Fifth, water stewardship has the capacity to decentralise water management efforts. Again, decentralisation is often a more powerful and enduring model than large scale centralisation of effort;
- Sixth, water stewardship appears to me to be more self sustaining than some other initiatives which are proposed from time to time to improve water management. For example public spirited appeals to people reduce their water use just because 'it's a good thing to do' are unlikely to be effective in the long term. Water stewardship has the potential to stimulate good practice for many years into the future;
- Seventh, water stewardship has another advantage. When the concept is fleshed out I'm sure it will be well nested into broader natural resource management. In this way it will be a less partial, more holistic solution. Our water problems will never be solved if we focus on parts of the picture but never the landscape as a whole;

- Eighth, water stewardship provides a channel for committed individuals, companies and organisations to exercise leadership in water management. Sometimes it can be lonely for an individual, or individual firm to operate by itself. Water stewardship machinery will enable well-intentioned individuals and firms to provide leadership in water management – well supported by water stewardship machinery; and
- Ninth, water stewardship should be able to forge a consensus throughout the economy and society about what good water management actually means. We currently lack this consensus and well meaning people are doing different things, sometimes even counterproductive things, in the name of good water management. As a nation we can do better than that.