WaterGuide

Setting a path to improved water management and use under scarcity

Water scarcity is threatening the viability of societies, economies and ecosystems across large areas of the planet. More than 50 per cent of the world's cities and 75 per cent of all irrigated farms are experiencing water shortages on a recurring basis, jeopardising future global food supplies, economic growth, environmental sustainability, and the viability of human settlements.

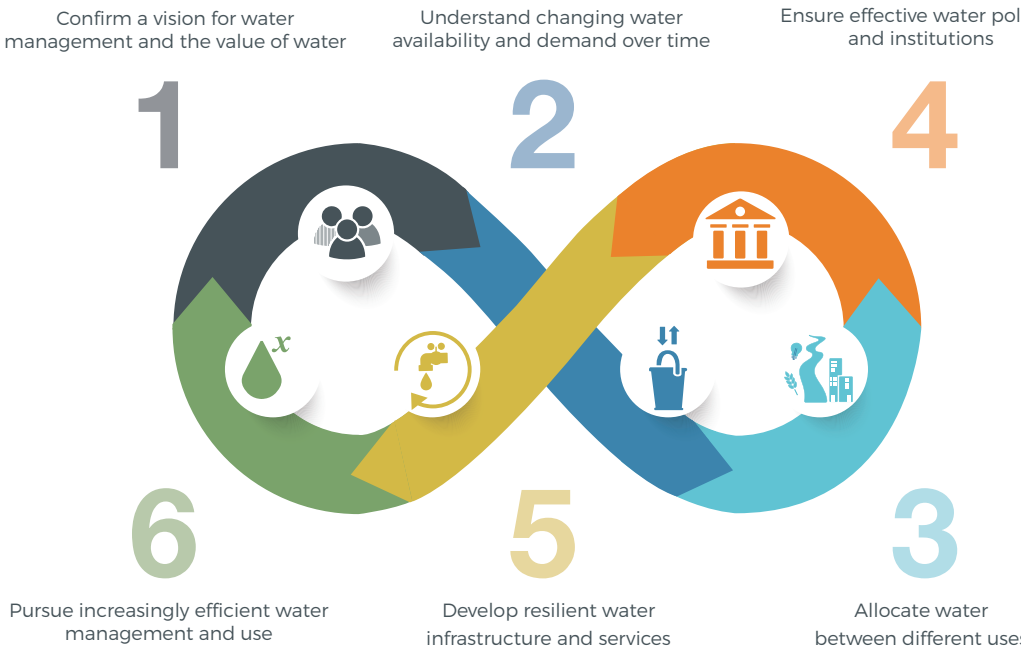
The Australian Government and Australian Water Partnership working through Aither and other Australian partners have developed WaterGuide, an organising framework for water management and use in response to scarcity, and a new Australian contribution to improved water management globally.

Australia has benefited greatly from improved water management, resulting from sustained and ongoing reform effort over more than three decades. Many countries facing challenges relating to water scarcity cannot afford such a long journey. WaterGuide aims to highlight the fundamental elements of improved water management, while identifying lessons learned by Australia that may help other governments to accelerate urgent reforms.

WaterGuide is intended to be used primarily by national or local governments in countries facing the challenge of water scarcity. It provides a starting point for dialogue and the development of practical partnerships, including between Australia and other countries.

Six elements of improved water management and use

In its simplest form, WaterGuide consists of six elements of improved water management and use. These elements are shown in the figure below.



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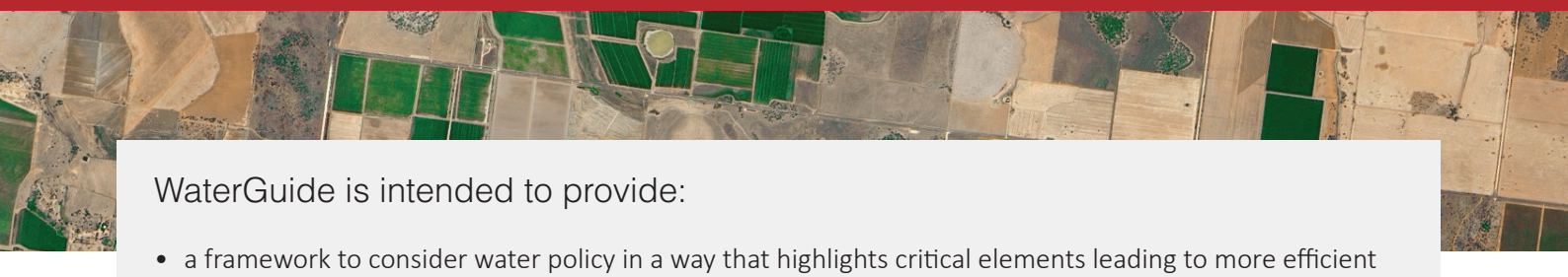

WaterGuide is intended to provide:

- a framework to consider water policy in a way that highlights critical elements leading to more efficient allocation and use of scarce water resources
- multiple entry points for decision makers seeking to adapt proven water management arrangements (including policy, regulation, incentives and institutions) to their own context
- a broad-brush approach to mapping required improvements and a 'deep dive' into one or more specific priority policy areas
- a lens through which to identify strengths, weaknesses and gaps in water planning, allocation and use arrangements in diverse jurisdictions, and to enable the prioritisation of reforms.

Lessons from application

WaterGuide: Setting a path to improved water management and use under scarcity was published in 2017, following wide consultation with water sector leaders representing national governments, multilateral institutions, and not-for-profit organisations.

Australia has worked with Jordan, Mexico and Senegal to apply WaterGuide through policy dialogue and on-ground project work. Lessons from these in-country applications were incorporated into a revised and improved version of WaterGuide launched at the 8th World Water Forum in 2018.

In each jurisdiction where WaterGuide has been applied, there are striking similarities in the way that water scarcity is impacting national and local economies, communities and environments:

- Surface water and/or groundwater is being utilised at an unsustainable rate, and this situation is being exacerbated due to the impacts of drought and climate change.
- Cities, towns and industries are facing the real risk of being unable to access secure water supplies in the future, if this is not already the case.
- Significant environmental assets, such as wetlands, are at risk or in terminal decline.
- The real extent and nature of the water management and use problem is often unclear, due to gaps in information, data and reporting.
- Capacity to finance solutions is limited, due in part to inadequate recovery of the costs of providing water infrastructure and services.
- Flexible reallocation of water within and between sectors is needed, in ways that are politically feasible, socially acceptable, environmentally sustainable, and economically efficient.
- A compelling narrative for reform, articulating the challenges and priorities for change in a way that is effective in mobilising action, is lacking.
- Solutions are available, and their implementation widely acknowledged as necessary, but decision makers feel hampered by political and/or institutional constraints.

These are typical of the challenges faced by those dealing with water scarcity and drought. While solutions will differ between countries, Australia intends for WaterGuide to assist in the identification of those solutions and help catalyse action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

For more information and to download WaterGuide, visit **www.waterpartnership.org.au/publications**

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