

8 November 2021

Greater Sydney Water Strategy
Submission from Rainwater Harvesting Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. Rainwater Harvesting Australia is the peak body for the rainwater harvesting industry and a division of Irrigation Australia Ltd

Rainwater Harvesting Australia welcomes the NSW Government's Draft Greater Sydney Water Strategy but warns that more needs to be done to improve building performance to manage water and stormwater.

It is clear from the data in the strategy that New South Wales needs to act quickly in order to respond to climate change and rapid urban growth and avoid serious water shortages, so we commend NSW on publishing a strategy and agree additional investment and a whole range of water sources will be required.

It is important to note that the strategy does not include the investment cost or a price path for the options outlined. Based on the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) analysis, total water charges in other parts of Australia which have only focussed on desalination, recycling, and a water grid instead of including water efficiency and rainwater harvesting, are nearly twice as much as those in Sydney.

Costs could be kept in check with a more integrated approach. In 2004, New South Wales introduced the Building Sustainability Index (BASIX), to ensure new and upgraded dwellings were energy and water efficient. BASIX is described by the Department of Planning Industry and Environment on their website as 'one of Australia's strongest sustainable planning measures' we couldn't agree more.

BASIX has outperformed all expectations. Research by a leading researcher in this field, Professor Peter Coombes, indicates BASIX has improved the water efficiency of over half a million buildings in NSW with \$3.4 billion in net benefits since 2004 already saving 79 billion litres. This makes BASIX one of the largest and most successful sustainability programs in Australia.

We are concerned that despite the extraordinary success of BASIX, the Water Strategy suggests that BASIX has not been a success. We call on the NSW Government to take BASIX to the next step, not only continue to drive energy and water efficiency, but to use the design of our buildings in an even better way to address significant water, cooling, stormwater, and flooding challenges and optimise the mix of demand and supply options. It is disappointing that BASIX, one of the cheapest, simplest and immediate solutions for water conservation has been overlooked.

Rainwater tanks cost around \$3,000 for a 5,000-litre tank. These tanks provide reduced stormwater volumes, high quality alternative water supplies, increased resilience, and improved water quality in local waterways.

In a recent meeting with industry, an adviser to the Minister for Planning Industry and the Environment and departmental officers said BASIX was not under threat. However, negative reference in the strategy is disturbing at a time when we are all trying to work together to protect the planet's most precious resource.

To remove the water efficiency targets from BASIX could see a net cost for the Greater Sydney Region of \$5.3 billion by 2050 and an additional demand for 78 billion litres of water annually. Given that water experts are forecasting a 30-80% decline in water runoff due to drought and climate change, it would seem incredible to stop capturing the rain that falls on our roofs.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and your consideration.

Yours sincerely



Mike Thompson
Chair, Rainwater Harvesting Australia
(a division of Irrigation Australia Ltd)