

Pathways to Water Sensitive Communities Seminar and Workshop 29 October 2015 Outcomes

Overview

On the 29 October 2015 Water Sensitive SA hosted the seminar and workshop *Pathways to water sensitive communities through planning*. The objective of the workshop was to provide an insight into the future direction of urban water policy and planning policy in South Australia, what WSUD policy and regulatory frameworks exist interstate, and which options for WSUD regulation are supported by South Australian practitioners.

The collective experiences of more than 60 local and state government and industry professionals from the planning, engineering and landscape design sectors participating in the seminar indicated an urgent need and strong support for a better approach to WSUD within the planning system.

Policy reform pathways were considered and feedback from participants demonstrated:

- ✓ 77% supported adoption of a WSUD module within the planning policy library/proposed state planning code
- ✓ 62% supported a Ministerial DPA on the proposed WSUD module to ensure policy is adopted concurrently across metropolitan Adelaide
- ✓ 62% supported the development of an offset system to provide for situations when performance measures cannot be met on site.

(n=37 returned surveys)

Workshop content

The program provided context for the South Australian WSUD policy agenda and opportunities for the future, together with an assessment of policy frameworks from five Australian cities and a case study of applied WSUD policy in metropolitan Sydney. The presentation topics were as follows:

- The SA WSUD Policy delivering on state priorities, Julia Grant, Executive Director, Water and Climate Change, DEWNR
- The case for WSUD, Mellissa Bradley, Water Sensitive SA
- The Planning, Development and Infrastructure Bill 2015 and opportunities to integrate WSUD, Andrew Gear, Executive Director, Statutory Planning, DPTI
- Policy frameworks for WSUD in five Australian Cities, Linda Choi, Monash University (Law Faculty)
- WSUD Planning Policy implementation and new directions for Blacktown, Mark Liebman, Blacktown City Council
- Development support tools across a range of scales, Mellissa Bradley, Water Sensitive SA
- Policy instruments and pathways for SA WSUD Policy, Baden Myers, University of South Australia
- Draft SA WSUD Planning Policy module, Martin Allen, DEWNR

The presentations were interspersed with plenary discussions and workshop sessions that provided participants with the opportunity to share the views on the way forward for WSUD in the planning context.

Key outcomes

Urban design code features/criteria

Participants were asked to describe a water sensitive approach for a range of development scenarios including: one allotment into two, a 20 townhouse residential development, an apartment block and commercial/ industrial developments and later, what could be included in the urban design code.

An overarching theme emerged that it is necessary to personalise what WSUD means to people and the places they inhabit, in particular:

- the retention and enhancement or establishment of green spaces
- liveability
- reduced urban heat effect
- affordability of development over entire lifecycle.

Some key design objectives and outcomes emerged as follows:

- To minimise the imperviousness of a site through: reduced dwelling/building footprint, rooftop gardens/green roofs, permeable paving.
- To deliver better quality green spaces that enforce requirements for the provision of trees and more intimate shaded spaces.
- To reintegrate urban water into the landscape to facilitate a range of benefits including microclimate cooling, local habitat and provision of attractive spaces for community use and wellbeing.
- Set a maximum directly connected impervious area value for certain allotment sizes
- Set minimum roof area directly connected to detention/retention devices, with a sliding scale dependent on the development type, scale and area.
- Set maximum site coverage as a percentage.
- Enforce greater permeability of pavements.
- Permeable surfaces for carparks.

While a deemed to comply guideline was supported to provide efficiencies in development application and approval processes, this was provisional to the following outcomes being achieved:

- Standardisation with room for innovation within any deemed to comply guideline.
- Flexibility at a range of scales (e.g. mum and dad developers to the big end of town).
- Flexibility for differing climatic and environmental conditions throughout the state.

Challenges that will need to be addressed in the development of the proposed urban design code that will replace the planning policy library, include:

- Must be simple so as to avoid a merit based assessment.
- Multiple driveways from narrow allotments restricting opportunities for street trees.
- An approach that it is cheaper to pave areas instead of providing green infrastructure/spaces due to maintenance cost concerns.
- How to reduce potable water demand.
- Consideration of the water balance of a whole site.
- Conventional development is compromising visual amenity.
- Urban heat island affect creating hot, inhospitable environments.
- Provision of private green spaces versus communal or offsite green infrastructure.

Proposed WSUD Module

During the workshop, DEWNR circulated a preliminary version of a proposed WSUD module for the State planning policy library (SPPL). The WSUD module draws upon the SA WSUD Policy (officially referred to as *Water sensitive urban design: Creating more liveable and water sensitive cities in South Australia*. Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources).

Workshop participants were asked to provide comment as to whether the proposed WSUD module was an adequate driver for change and what other policy could it include. Key ideas emerging from this discussion are detailed below:

- There is a lack of clarity over the scale at which the policy is intended to apply.
- Need better integration with the existing Natural Resources Management module with the SPPL, e.g. "minimise hydrological impacts", given WSUD may deliver positive hydrological impacts, need to reword to specify "negative" or "adverse" hydrological impacts.
- The WSUD module should include wider benefits such as quality of the environment, liveable spaces, greenery, microclimate.
- Needs better terminology, e.g. targets on annual basis.
- Inclusion of a definition of "pre-development, i.e. does it infer what is there today versus what was originally there?"
- Flood risk should be defined, i.e. flood risk to what?
- Need to specify the critical storm for the specific catchment.
- Need to use stronger language than "should".
- Need to consider the elements of integrated water management in addition to WSUD including:
 - runoff capture for re-use
 - wastewater re-use
 - integrated design for amenity, health, wellbeing, microclimate, biodiversity and liveability.
- Standard conditions need to be available that address environmental requirements.
- Need a mechanism to refer to other technical documents, e.g. stormwater management plans.

There is also an opportunity to cross reference with state climate change policy for complementary outcomes.

Technical Guidelines

Awareness of the existing WSUD Technical Manual was low amongst workshop participants. Those who were aware of the resource indicated that it was too big and not readily or widely referenced, it is very difficult to locate (note: it is on new Water Sensitive SA website). Scenario specific solutions in a deemed to comply guideline could make the technical information more accessible to planners and development applicants.

Other tools

There was interest in the investigation of opportunities under the Building Regulations and the Building Code of Australia to better support WSUD outcomes, although limited detail was provided.

Other regulatory mechanisms

The notion of an offset scheme was widely supported within a framework that provided equity with respect to who pays and who benefits. Tradeable stormwater credits were also seen as an option to incentivise changes in practice.

Those concerned about an offset scheme raised issue with the amenity value of the development itself if the benefits are to be employed elsewhere and how far from the site should any offset be applied, i.e. should there be any limits or could they be traded out of the planning jurisdiction?

Where to from here

At the conclusion of the workshop the Program Manager offered to raise the key findings of the workshop with the Minister for Planning, in support of DEWNR initiatives to integrate the SA WSUD Policy within the State Planning Policy Library. A letter detailing the key matters raised by participants in the workshop was issued to the Minister for Planning on 1 February 2016 by Water Sensitive SA.

Conclusion

The workshop sessions that followed the presentation gleaned some excellent comments to inform the better integration of WSUD policy within regulatory frameworks, in particular planning policy. It was made clear, however, that policy within the planning system alone is not enough to deliver the widespread shift in practice sought by practitioners and that other legislative measures need to reinforce any WSUD policy, including quantitative performance criteria. This could include provisions under the Environment Protection Act and incentives such as offset schemes or tradable stormwater credits.

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