

Question on Notice
No. 696
Asked on Thursday, 12 May 2005

MRS PRATT asked the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women (MS DESLEY BOYLE) –

QUESTION:

With reference to the usage of water and water waste in urban, regional and rural Queensland-

- (1) On a per-capita basis, what is the average household consumption of water in urban Brisbane, major regional towns including coastal towns, and smaller rural towns over the past 12 months?
- (2) What measures does she intend to put in place in urban areas, apart from local government measures, to ensure that wastage is kept to a minimum?
- (3) As it has been reported that the cost of water in urban Brisbane is far lower than other areas of the State, what is the average cost to urban dwellings compared to rural towns for water consumption?
- (4) Does she intend to leave all water costs to local government, or will a government surcharge be introduced to help stop the huge amount of water wasted by urban dwellers?
- (5) What new legislation is being proposed to make urban residents be as responsible as rural residents through the Government's tough rural water policies via local government bodies?

ANSWER:

(1) The current average residential water use across South East Queensland is 300 litres per person. There is no accurate data for the other regions of Queensland at present, as many rural and regional local governments do not have the capacity to provide this kind of information. This issue will be addressed as part of my Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation's review of water data requirements, which is intended to set up a new data regime to provide a complete picture of water supply and demand in Queensland.

(2) A wide range of initiatives are being progressed on a whole of government basis to develop water recycling, demand management and water-use efficiency measures as well as legislative changes to reduce potable water consumption and contribute to the achievement of water reduction targets in South East Queensland and other parts of the State. Other mechanisms include increasing the uptake of water-use efficiency products and fittings and assisting local governments in implementing water reduction efficiency programs. The State's focus is on providing councils with a range of tools to enable them to reduce urban water consumption.

(3) For water businesses run by the 18 largest councils (representing 84.7% of all water connections in Queensland), the average consumption charge for water ranges between \$0.27 and \$0.94 per kilolitre. Brisbane City Council charges \$0.84 per kilolitre. For councils with more than 5000 water connections (representing 7.37% of all water connections in Queensland), the average consumption charge for water ranges between \$0.42 and \$0.79 per kilolitre. For councils above 1000 but below 5000 connections (representing 6.41% of all water connections in Queensland), the average consumption charge for water ranges between \$0.15 and \$0.80 per kilolitre.

Brisbane City Council is not undercharging consumers for water. Like other large councils, it must set water charges to recover the full cost of water services. Variations in water charges across the State are more likely to result from differences in supply costs than councils undercharging for water. Over 90% of water connections in Queensland are accessing water services that operate on a full cost recovery basis.

(4) The Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation is currently working with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines to review urban water pricing to develop additional pricing principles for possible inclusion in the water pricing framework in the *Local Government Act 1993*. These pricing principles may be used in conjunction with other water saving strategies to encourage efficient water usage, and to conserve water supply to accommodate an increasing population. The study will be broadened to analyse pricing options for recycled water, stormwater and trade wastes.

The State Government has no intention of overriding councils in setting water charges. Councils have embraced the water pricing reforms adopted by the Commonwealth and the States, with the result that over 90% of urban water connections in Queensland are subject to consumption charging through a two-part tariff.

Councils facing severe water shortages because of drought conditions cannot rely on pricing alone to conserve water. Water restrictions are essential for managing water supplies in drought situations. South East Queensland councils are to be commended for their recent initiative in introducing water restrictions to manage supplies during the current dry conditions.

(5) A broad range of legislation will emerge from the mechanisms being developed to reduce water consumption in urban areas. Some examples currently being progressed include (but are not limited to) - greywater use in sewerered areas, mandatory installation of water-use efficiency devices in new developments, water efficiency labelling and standards and the review of pricing principles under the *Local Government Act 1993*. Other legislative requirements may emerge as other initiatives progress.