

# Power, People, Water:

## Urban Water Services & Human Behaviour in Australia

The situation facing the young mid-nineteenth century urban centres of the Australian colonies was one of increasing populations, unstructured water supplies and the informal disposal of urban wastes. These led increasingly and inevitably to the need for society to organise the implementation of secure and clean water reticulation, the provision of storm water and waste management, and the beginnings of pollution controls. In the absence of such measures, storm waters and pollution would foul water supplies, resulting in insanitary conditions which would threaten health and survival of the new Colonies. Compared with earlier colonial times our 21<sup>st</sup> century water management practices are vastly improved, but we have continuing and new challenges to our potable and waste water future. The quality and volume of our supplies are still subject to risk, but with effective planning these risks can be minimised. Recent periods of water scarcity have inspired social scientists to consider how changes to some aspects of individual and household behaviour can make significant contributions to meeting our new challenges. Similarly, researchers and practitioners of public policy are considering initiatives with incentives that encourage more efficient use and management of water resources. This, in addition to better management of wastes, can greatly enhance ways in which urban residents and their communities can further secure affordable, safe and sustained water services.

Recognising the need for broad and integrated water reforms such as those called for in the 2004 National Water Initiative and its implementation body, the National Water Commission, this ASSA Symposium draws upon social science based knowledge of our evolving urban landscapes and the demands, expectations and behaviour of their inhabitants. These are considered in the context of variable annual and seasonal needs and the compromises that must be made with the requirements of rural industry and environmental sustainability.

This Symposium looks to a future when the individual's behaviour toward water resources is rationalised for the benefit of the consumer and the resource. Similarly, the Symposium is in support of governmental structures and policies that are directed toward identifying opportunities to develop urban water systems that are environmentally sustainable, economically feasible, socially equitable and meet public health imperatives.



With Assistance From:

Australian Government  
National Water Commission

# Cunningham Lecture

Open to the public

Professor Robert O'Neill



World Order Under Stress:  
Issues and Initiatives  
for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Tuesday 20 November (5.30pm - 6.30pm):  
Shine Dome, Gordon Street, Acton

Professor Robert O'Neill has spent his life studying international conflict. He was Head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the ANU 1971-82, Director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London 1982-87, Chichele Professor of the History of War at Oxford 1987-2001, and Chairman of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra 2000-05

## Fellows' Colloquium Social Science Research: making our research count

Convened by

Professor Anne Edwards & Professor Don Aitkin

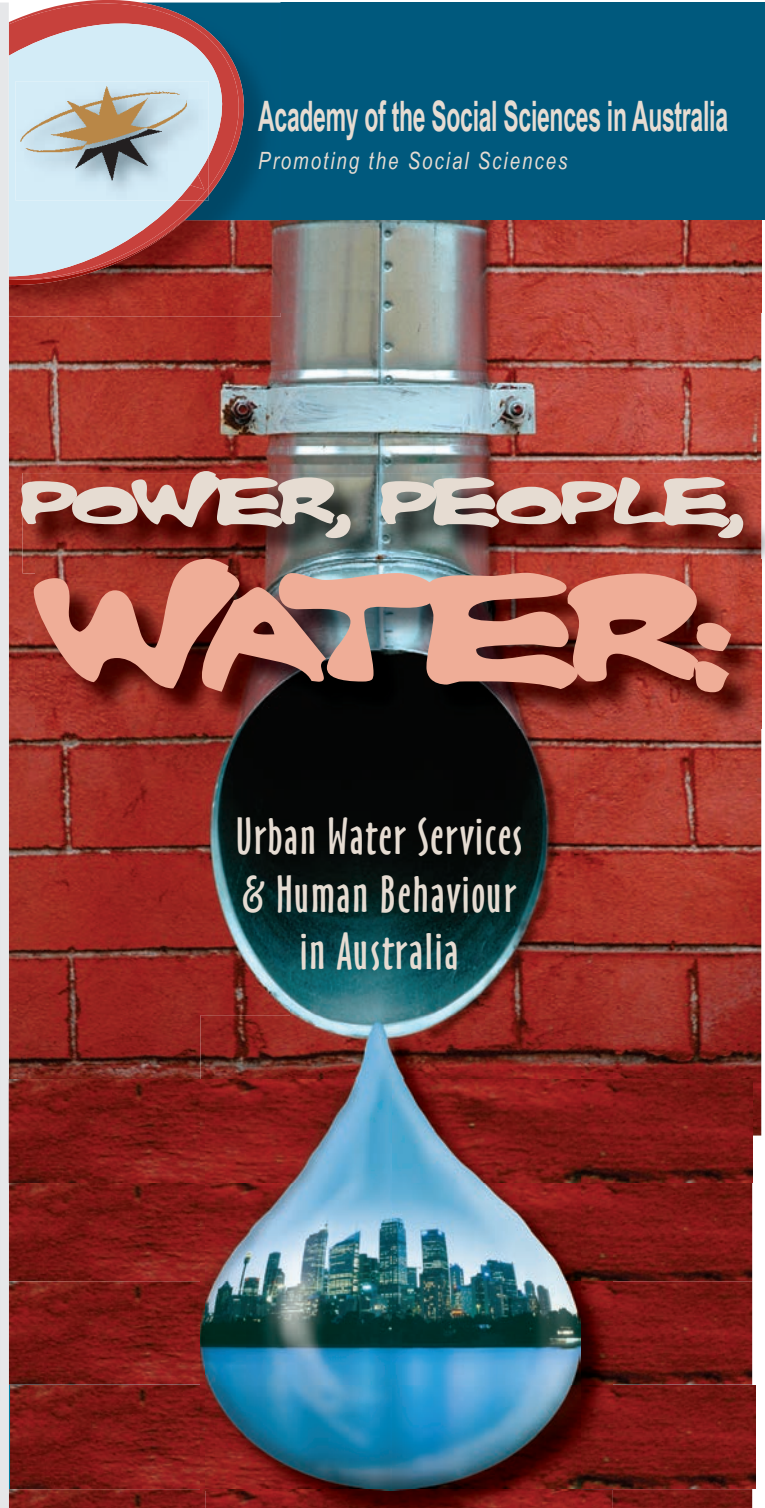
Monday 19 November (7.30pm - 9.00pm)  
Drawing Room, University House,  
Australian National University

For further information on Symposium 2007, visit:

<http://www.assa.edu.au>



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Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia  
Promoting the Social Sciences

20 November 2007  
Shine Dome, Canberra



# Symposium Program

- 9.30 – 9.40 Welcome, Stuart Macintyre,  
President of ASSA
- 9.40 – 9.45 Brief Context, Patrick Troy/Jim Walter
- 9.45 – 10.00 Social Dimensions of the  
National Water Initiative.  
Ken Matthews, Chief Executive Officer  
National Water Commission

## Session 1 The supply of potable water and waste management services

A supply of potable water is crucial to the health and future of Australian cities. The history of its provision was one of 'big engineering', inter-basin transfer, and dependence on a complex of local and state government authorities. The demands of sanitation, waste management and increased consumerism have resulted in sharp secular increase in the use of potable water. New and emerging technologies that avoid or moderate the use of potable water can be complemented by changes in consumer behaviour.

- 10.00 – 10.15 Tony Dingle
- 10.15 – 10.30 Peter Spearritt
- 10.30 – 11.00 Discussion - Chair: Patrick Troy
- 11.00 – 11.30 Morning Tea

## Session 2 Socio-cultural and behavioural determinants of consumption

Socio-cultural changes in attitudes to 'dirt', bodily cleanliness and the transformation of bathrooms from a functional space to a site of leisure and pleasure, the rise of consumerism, increased use of water-using equipment and the commodification of water have all led to increased water consumption inside the dwelling. External consumption has also increased and been affected by socio-cultural attitudes to gardening, the garden as a site for leisure and pleasure and the effect of the garden city notions on the Australian city.

- 11.30 – 11.45 Graeme Davison
- 11.45 – 12.00 Lesley Head
- 12.00 – 12.30 Discussion - Chair: Patrick Troy
- 12.30 – 2.00 Lunch

## Session 3 The politics of water services and the culture of supply institutions

The growth of cities and their increasing demand for water services has raised the issue of the politics, powers and cultures of the institutions supplying water services in the public debate. Water supply authorities have undergone a transformation from 'public health' authorities funded and managed by the communities they serve, to agencies providing water services in a more market oriented environment. This has meant that their activities may be subordinated to government budget strategies and/or subjected to corporatisation and privatisation.

- 2.00 – 2.15 Steve Dovers
- 2.15 - 2.30 Geoff Syme
- 2.30 – 3.00 Discussion - Chair: Jim Walter

## 3.00 – 3.30 Afternoon Tea

## Session 4 Individual rights to water and the public interest

Property rights and the development of inalienable environmental rights in water contend with the compulsory water supply and sewerage services provided by monopoly suppliers on grounds of protection of the public interest. In the minds of consumers, public-private partnerships stand uneasily with the perceived water rights accruing to individuals. How should the rights of individuals be assured? What is the role of water pricing in managing supply and in reducing environmental stresses?

- 3.30 – 3.45 Janice Gray/ Alex Gardner
- 3.45 – 4.00 Lee Godden
- 4.00 – 4.45 Discussion - Speakers' Panel  
Chair: Patrick Troy
- 4.45 – 5.30 President's Drinks at the Dome
- 5.30 – 6.30 Cunningham Lecture  
World Order Under Stress: Issues &  
Initiatives for the 21st Century  
Robert O'Neill

Professor Tony Dingle is Associate Dean, Education, in the Faculty of Business and Economics at Monash University. His current projects include studies of the growth of consumerism in Australia, urban transformations in old inner city industrial areas, the evolution of miner's houses and a history of the relationship between Melbourne and the River Yarra.

Professor Peter Spearritt, like thousands of other Australians, has belatedly put in water tanks, illegal in Brisbane until recently. As Director of the Brisbane Institute he drew attention to the impact on the ecology of the 200 kilometre city from Noosa to the Tweed, in south-east Queensland. Professor Spearritt works in the Centre for Applied History and Heritage at the University of Queensland.

Professor Graeme Davison retired as Professor of History at Monash University at the end of 2005 but remains Director of the Monash University London Centre. He has published widely on Australian urban history, most recently his *Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (revised edition 2004) and *Car Wars: How the Car Won Our Hearts and Changed our Cities* (2004).

Professor Lesley Head is a geographer, currently Head of the School of Earth & Environmental Sciences at the University of Wollongong. Her discussion on water draws on her ARC project on backyards, soon to be published as a book with co-author Pat Muir, *Backyard. Nature and Culture in Suburban Australia*.

Professor Stephen Dovers undertakes research on policy and institutional aspects of sustainability at The Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University. His recent books include *Environment and Sustainability Policy* (Federation Press, 2005) and the forthcoming edited volume *Managing Water for Australia* (CSIRO Publishing).

Dr Geoff Syme is Research Director of Society, Economy and Policy in CSIRO Land and Water. Geoff has been involved with social research in urban and rural water resources for thirty years. He has developed an international reputation in fairness in environmental decision making and planning and social assessments of policies and institutional decision making processes.

Mr Alex Gardner teaches public law and natural resources law to undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Western Australia Law School. He also teaches water resources law to graduate students at the Australian National University Law School. His main fields of research are natural resources and environmental law, with a current focus on water law.

Ms Janice Gray is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Law, University of New South Wales. She has published nationally and internationally in the field of native title and nationally in the fields of Property, Equity and Water Law. She has co-authored a book entitled *Property Law in New South Wales* (Butterworths, 2003 & 2007).

Dr Lee Godden is an Associate Professor, Law School, and Director, Office for Environmental Programs, at the University of Melbourne. Currently, she is undertaking a project examining whether property models promote sustainability in the resolution of competing claims to land and resources, with a focus on water regulation and water trading.