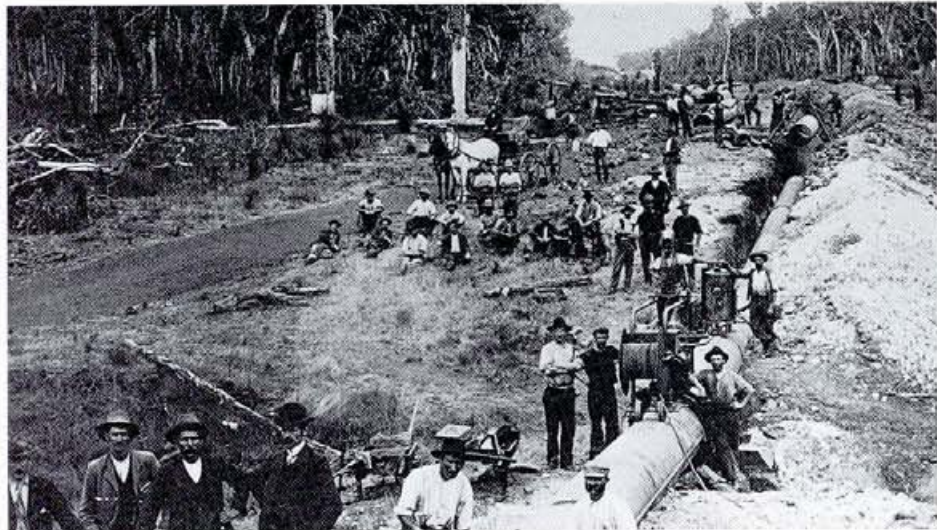




WATER WORKS



Water Authority of Western Australia



Tony Holmes

Left: In 1905 a new pipeline brought water from Perth to the Goldfields. Residents are now being encouraged to use the water wisely. Above: Phil Stanley with indigenous plants bound for low-water-use gardens in Kalgoorlie.

Waterwise on the Golden Mile

IN 1895, Kalgoorlie was flush with people, pubs and gold, but the demand for water far outstripped supply. With rainfall in the Golden Mile averaging only 225 millimetres a year, 1000 gallons of this precious resource would cost a digger \$2.50-\$8.

Ten years later the goldfield's water problem was solved, thanks to Charles Yelverton O'Connor, Western Australia's engineer-in-chief of Public Works and Manager of Railways. O'Connor's \$5 million scheme involved building a storage reservoir in the Darling Ranges near Perth and pumping water inland through a 557-kilometre steel pipeline.

Amazingly, the Goldfields and Agricultural Scheme took less than five years to build. But it's an exercise that the Water Authority of WA has no wish to repeat.

A century on, the demand for water in regions supplied by Mundaring Reservoir is again outstripping supply. Perth's metropolitan areas, agricultural settlements along the pipeline's length, and Kalgoorlie Boulder itself have experienced water restrictions since October last year (1994).

The cost of getting water to Kalgoorlie Boulder is one of the highest in the state and water charges to the consumer are heavily subsidised. The authority, in an effort to avoid the even greater cost of supplying extra water to the goldfields, has made Kalgoorlie Boulder the focus of a flagship scheme designed to cut local water use by 15%.

Project manager of the Waterwise

scheme, Rod Botica, says a range of tactics is being used to promote water-use efficiency.

Promotional material endorsed by musician John Williamson explains what householders can do to save water. This includes signing up for free changeovers to water-saving shower roses and dual-flush toilets; free tap checks, tap timers and adjustments; and free advice on garden design, plant selection and irrigation. It is hoped that water use in each household will be cut by 120 000 litres a year.

Central to the scheme's early success has been involvement in a public advisory committee involving representatives from the local Chamber of Commerce and City Council as well as plumbers, irrigators, landscape gardeners, nursery managers and householders. Botica says the committee has facilitated important community feedback and cooperation.

One of the committee members is Phil Stanley of Kalgoorlie Garden Centre. Stanley says gardening uses more water than any other aspect of the household.

Under the Waterwise scheme, trained assessors will explain ways of cutting back on watering, without reducing the appeal of the garden. A range of garden designs in which plants are arranged in 'hydrozones' of the same water needs are being drawn up, and people who cut back on 100 square metres of lawn will qualify for free plants and mulch.

Stanley says one way to promote low-water-use gardens is using plants that look

good, and are suited to local conditions. He says indigenous plants are ideal, but few are available due to a lack of demand and difficulties in their propagation.

Botica says the authority is looking to extend the Waterwise program to small country towns with independent water sources. And in the long-term the scheme may be used as a model Australia-wide.

In the meantime, the projected cost savings from Kalgoorlie Boulder's \$2.3 million retrofit are expected to be \$6 million, including a \$3.5 million net benefit in infrastructure savings. 'That means we can keep the prices lower for longer,' Botica says.

Bryony Bennett

Wise for a week

WISE water use will be promoted during this year's National Water Week activities which are scheduled for October 22-28. Water Week aims to focus community attention on catchment quality and water quality issues. It is an initiative of the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand and is coordinated through the New South Wales Department of Land and Water Resources. National Water Watch Day will occur across Australia on October 25 and various activities — including family days, public seminars, tours of water facilities and award ceremonies — are planned at state and regional levels for other days of the week. For details contact the national secretariat office on (02) 895 7862, fax (02) 895 7102.