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Call for more sustainable water supply strategies

World experts at a recent UNESCO workshop on 'Challenges and Solutions for Planning and Operating Dams for Optimised Benefits' have called for better leadership and more investment in sustainable dam siting, design and operations around the world.



Credit: MurrayRiver.com.au

'There are other ways of operating dams and planning for dams that are more sustainable than what we have done in the past and are still doing,' says Assoc. Prof. Robyn Watts from Charles Sturt University's Institute of Land, Water and Society. 'For example, through the application of innovative management approaches, it is possible to optimise hydropower, flood risk management, ecosystem protection and food security objectives.'

Assoc. Prof. Watts adds that dams cannot be considered in isolation and solutions for improved water planning and management need to be implemented at the catchment scale.

'An individual dam is only one component of a larger water management system,' she says.

Mr Ross Young, Executive Director of the Water Services Association of Australia, says that while dams are currently a valuable and relatively cheap source of water compared to recycling and desalination, 'no water supply option should be automatically eliminated – or acted on – until the social implications and environmental consequences are considered and its merits assessed on a broad scale.'

'A blanket ban on new dams is not good policy,' he says.

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