

Aussies 'want to re-use stormwater'

Australians may strongly support the recycling of stormwater, according to evidence from three local water surveys.



Credit: CSIRO

The survey – by a scientific team from the [National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training](#) and The University of South Australia – found that residents in Salisbury (SA), Charles Sturt (SA) and the Gold Coast (Qld) local government areas are mainly supportive of using stormwater for non-drinking purposes and are keen to learn how to keep urban runoff clean.

The positive attitudes emerging from these regions indicates potential to initially implement stormwater harvesting projects for non-drinking uses, which will provide relief for many cities to the growing threat of water scarcity, says the centre's Professor Jennifer McKay, who led the team.

‘Stormwater harvesting has become an important option for many Australian cities as the nation faces increasing pressure to its freshwater supplies. It was essential to find out if Australians supported it.

‘We chose to survey residents in Salisbury and Charles Sturt because South Australia leads the nation in stormwater capture and reuse, while South-East Queensland is Australia’s fastest growing region, which, despite its recent flood experiences, imposes significant pressure on its water resources.

‘Out of 320 respondents, an average of 60 per cent supported the use of stormwater. Although the remaining people were unsure, they were rarely negative as long as the water quality was guaranteed and it was not at this stage intended to be used for drinking purposes.’

While 36 per cent of the respondents weren’t sure how much they were willing to pay for treated stormwater, a significant number in all cities were willing to pay half the current local fresh water price, Prof. McKay says.

The team found that the respondents' attitudes towards stormwater use were closely related to how much contact would be needed. Given a choice of end-uses, including personal washing, pet washing, toilet flushing, clothes washing, watering vegetables and lawns and car washing, personal washing was the least preferred use.

'An encouraging finding was that 26 per cent of respondents were already reusing greywater (water from showers, hand washing and clothes washing) on their gardens, while 25 per cent wanted to take up this practice in the future,' adds Prof. McKay.

'Most of them saw a need for local councils to inform the community about stormwater capture and use, meaning that there is still scope for educating people on how to manage stormwater quality.

'While this is not a national survey, we could implement successful stormwater harvesting projects if we run proper education, awareness and water treatment programs for and with local residents so that stormwater re-use does not pose a serious public health risk.

'As water conservation becomes an increasing priority across Australia, stormwater harvesting will most likely play a significant role in future climate change adaptation strategies – and it is encouraging to know that a majority of the people we surveyed are already in favour of it.'

Professor McKay said that the volumes of stormwater running off Australia's cities were very large, but ensuring its safety and freedom from pollutants remains a major technical challenge.

There was encouraging scientific evidence that water injected and stored underground undergoes a natural cleansing process, which could help, she added.

Source: National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training

From ECOS online <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC12219>