



## Water Efficiency in Residential Buildings

### Policy Background

- Water efficiency requirements for new residential buildings were introduced in several states in the mid-2000s via planning and building regulations. These provisions address fittings and fixtures to make efficient use of water and in some cases, address substitute water sources such as rainwater or grey water supply.
- The Water Efficiency Labelling Standards (WELS) Scheme was established in 2005 and requires a mandatory labelling system for certain water using fixtures, manufactured in Australia and imported to Australia, which nominates the star rating of the product.
- The National Construction Code incorporated an additional volume, the Plumbing Code of Australia (PCA) in 2011.
- The inclusion of PCA into the NCC provides an important avenue to achieve minimum necessary regulations for plumbing and drainage including for water efficiency requirements for housing.

### Policy Issues

- Water efficiency in residential buildings is a combination of demand management (identifying methods for reducing water consumption) and source substitution (identifying alternative water supply options to potable water) in the operation of the building.
- The benefit that can be derived by the home owner from end of line water collection solutions reaches a point where the costs for the additional water far exceed the savings that can be gained by the home owner.
- Government spending, both Federal and State, on major urban water infrastructure has been poor and in many cases the cost burden of capturing water supply and conserving water has been shifted onto the residential development industry through regulations on land development, mandating water saving fittings and fixtures in new homes and charging infrastructure levies on new land to provide urban water infrastructure.
- The housing industry is already making significant progress through its willingness to construct on site water storage and treatment facilities to service major land releases on the fringes of capital cities and in some rural areas.
- State and local government have introduced a range of regulations aimed at reducing water consumption through mandating alternate water supply and water efficient fittings in new homes and renovations. Existing homes, which form the bulk of housing stock, are not required to meet similar water efficiency levels.
- HIA promotes voluntary, market-based solutions and the HIA GreenSmart program encourages designers and builders to voluntarily implement design and construction methods to conserve natural resources, including water.
- The mandatory imposition of installing rainwater tanks for all new homes is impractical in many situations and can be particular difficult for smaller sites and apartment buildings.
- The benefit of demand management solutions, including mandatory water efficiency fittings and appliances provides a consistent, cost effective means of reducing water consumption in both new and existing homes.

- Products used in plumbing and drainage installations are required to meet WaterMark Certification Scheme and WELS water efficiency schemes, however, the co-ordination of approvals between these two schemes is complex and inconsistent.

### **HIA's Policy Position on Water Efficiency in Residential Buildings**

1. The housing industry acknowledges the need to build environmentally responsible housing and land developments through reducing demand for water and, where appropriate, identifying alternative water sources to potable water.
2. Voluntary, market-based solutions (such as our successful GreenSmart program) must be encouraged, before government contemplates regulations, as a more effective means of generating innovation and new practices in water efficient housing and land development.
3. The installation of water efficient fixtures and fittings in existing housing should be promoted to reduce water usage.
4. Where regulation is necessary to achieve water efficiency in housing, HIA supports minimum necessary regulations being applied through the National Construction Code (NCC), the Plumbing Code of Australia (PCA) and associated standards referenced by the PCA.
5. Any new water efficiency regulations must be developed according to the Council of Australian Governments' principles for best practice regulation.
6. Building standards for water efficiency should not be incorporated into planning regulations. Any state based regulations should be pursued through a variation to the NCC, justified through a detailed regulation impact assessment, and based on a proven difference due to geographical, geological or climatic conditions.
7. HIA supports options and incentives to achieve improved water efficiency however, HIA does not support the mandatory provision of water tanks to residential buildings in metropolitan areas or a requirement for the tank to be connected to the house.
8. Federal and State governments should provide appropriate support for the upgrading and development of new water infrastructure which will deliver additional water supply, is more water efficient in design and delivery, and reduces the demand on potable water supplies for non-potable uses.
9. Federal and State governments should coordinate rebates to existing and new home owners for the voluntary installation of improved hot water services, rainwater tanks and other alternative water saving technologies.

### **Plumbing Products**

10. HIA supports the use of the WaterMark Certificate Scheme (WMCS) for the labelling of all water fittings and fixtures in residential buildings to complement efficiencies gained through the subdivision design and water infrastructure supply which incorporates alternative water supply for potable and non-potable uses in both new and existing homes.
11. HIA supports the WaterMark Scheme applying to products at the point of sale.
12. HIA supports minimum water efficiency ratings for toilets, taps, showers and household appliances through the Water Efficiency Labelling Standards (WELS) Scheme.
13. HIA supports maintaining the current provision that in display homes, as an alternative to placing complying labels on all WELS products, it is acceptable for a builder to erect a display panel or identify WELS product ratings in supporting product literature and display centres.

14. HIA supports further coordination and streamlining of approvals/certification for products between the WELS and WaterMark Schemes, and for Governments to consider integration of the schemes under a single assessment and enforcement process.
15. HIA does not support any moves by state or territory governments to override nationally agreed and approved accreditation schemes such as WaterMark for plumbing products.