

International Development Policy Submission

This response is provided the Australian Water Association (AWA). It is provided in addition to our support for the joint WaterAid and Australian Water Partnership (AWP) response.

Water underpins the advancement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Our response

- Water is the medium that we will all experience the impacts of climate change first.
- Access to clean water and sanitation services (SG6), underpins and/or influences the achievement of all SDGs.



Water sector's role in SDGs (source: being confirmed)

- We are the worst performing region in the world on SG6, and this has a cumulative affect on the outcomes that access to clean water and sanitation impacts and influences (see diagram above).
- Climate resilience and water resilience are two parts of the same challenge – creating and maintaining sustainable, productive and liveable communities, regions and cities.

- Investment in SG6 (this includes water resources management and WASH) investment in our region has significantly decreased over the past decade and is currently only ~3% of the aid budget.
- Development funding in SDG6 (Water resource management and WASH) is not enough to achieve SG6 targets in our region by 2030.
- Water resource management is increasingly important as it explores and responds to the role water plays in sustainable and productive communities and regions beyond the provision of clean water and sanitation services and into water's role in food security, energy generation, sustaining healthy ecosystem and protecting cultural and spiritual values of waterways, as well as managing the integrated nature of risks, floods, droughts, climate change and the social, environmental and economic impacts associated with all of the above.
- Our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific are on the front line of water related climate impacts now – regional resilience and water security depends on our ability to act swiftly in a way that re-establishes confidence, trust and two-way dialogue.
- Australia is well positioned to assist our neighbours due to the maturity of our water and wastewater management and systems and our growing understanding of water resource management including natural system solutions, indigenous land and water management techniques and how water can empower productive, and sustainable communities.
- Australia should take a leadership role in driving institutional and operational progress on water resource management, including water supply resilience and wastewater resource recovery, and WASH.
- Improving the institutional and operational management of water resources and wastewater services helps build long term system resilience, and drive key climate adaptation and net zero action.
- Improving WASH access underpins efforts to improve gender inequality and social exclusion, health outcomes and quality of care in health facilities, participation in schools, and building community resilience to climate change.
- AWA is Australia's largest water network and peak industry association. We have over 5,500 members and our members represent the entire water sector across Australia, and include water utilities and authorities, local, state and federal government agencies, regulators, energy providers, universities and research organisations, manufacturers and suppliers, laboratories and water testing companies, technology and IoT companies, infrastructure partners, specialist contractors and consulting and advisory companies.
- AWA has existing relationships and MoU's with many of our neighbouring country water associations.
- AWA's strength lies in our ability to connect with leaders and innovators in the water sector (across public, private and educational) and collaboratively bring them together to solve complex and multi-faceted problems.

- Australia's water sector is well positioned to assist with the advancement of SG6 in our region at three levels of water resource management: Institutional, Operational and Individual. Our lessons and advancements in enabling institutional frameworks, water resource planning, infrastructure investment and prioritisation, climate adaptation and mitigation, nature-based solutions, data-based decision making, centralised and decentralised systems, community engagement, technical skills development and assessment, asset and resource management, disaster and risk/resource recovery and technical innovations mean that we are able to provide holistic assistance and response to the sustainable achievement of SDG 6 in our region whilst at the same time bolstering our own approaches and methodologies in managing multivariate vulnerabilities and opportunities.
- Key lessons from AWA's work in the International Development arena suggest:
 - Outcomes based Programs, that allow time and resources to engage with partners as equals, build trust and explore the challenges and opportunities through cultural, social, political, technical, economic and environmental lenses, before solution selection is vital in ensuring both the short term and long-term effectiveness of any solution/ investment.
 - Infrastructure investment should always be coupled with strategies for building long-term capacity and skills at an institutional, operational level, and human level, as well as addressing issues of skills retention to ensure communities and regions can become self-sustaining.
 - Bringing together experts from different aspects of water management, including GEDSI and community engagement experts, increases the impact of any program/ project.
 - Utilising existing and trusted peak Associations/ NFPs to foster whole of sector/ leading sector involvement will improve coordination, facilitation and development of responses to assist with the achievement of SG 6 in our region is both efficient and effective.
 - Greater emphasis on co-creating Program/ projects outcomes and tactics with our neighbours and partners ensures the response is coordinated adequately and is matched to the socio-political and human context of the specific challenge at hand.
 - Robust monitoring and evaluation techniques and frameworks should be developed in collaboration with all partners at the outset of any Program, and M&E tracking often needs to occur post project close to fully measure benefits and impact.
 - Streamlining access to longer-term development funding and prioritising outcomes-based reporting would reduce barriers to cross sectoral engagement and involvement.
 - Greater communication of regional Development players, outcomes, activities and tactics would assist the Australian water sector to contribute to the achievement of development outcomes in our region.

- The absence of an Australian Development narrative that includes water limits engagement of the Australia water sector.
- Supporting the in-situ trialling and contextualisation of technology, including economic assessment and business model development can improve community resilience to external pressures and shocks, and improve self-sustaining practices.
- AWA wholeheartedly supports DFAT's increased focus on climate resilience and water security in our region.
- We would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with DFAT to harness and utilise Australia's water sector knowledge, skills and expertise to drive outcomes at a regional level.
- Please contact either Corinne Cheeseman, Chief Executive Australian Water Association (ccheeseman@awa.asn.au) or Sally Armstrong, Head of International and Industry Programs Australian Water Association (sarmstrong@awa.asn.au) to discuss further.