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# Media Release

## **Water, water, who's got the water?**

### **Asks the Australian Spatial Information Business Association (ASIBA)**

**Canberra, 1 March 2007**

The Prime Minister's \$10b National Plan for Water Security has ASIBA's cautious approval, though the peak industry body says that the Plan overemphasises how much water is being extracted from water systems rather than measuring how much is in them in the first place.

"We're delighted that the Plan recognises ASIBA's long-held and much touted view that the government needs to invest in *water information*," said ASIBA Chairman, Michael Easton.

"But the fact remains that if you allocate what comes out before you've measured what's in there, in the first place, then you're operating from a false premise and all derivative calculations must therefore be questionable," he said.

Easton points out that even the Prime Minister, when he released his water plan, said "*you can't manage what you don't measure*".

"ASIBA believes we must first know, clearly and unequivocally, how much water we have to begin with before we start allocating volumes to the environment, or agriculture, or any other cause or stakeholder. This measurement is fundamental to any effective national water policy," said Easton.

The government has proposed \$480 million be given to the Bureau of Meteorology, which comes under the control of the Minister for Environment and Water Resources, Malcolm Turnbull, to improve water resource measurement and water usage metering and to build a comprehensive water accounting system.

"ASIBA has been lobbying the Australian Government for the past three years, since the National Water Initiative was first announced, to undertake a comprehensive standards-based measurement of water assets, as a starting point," said ASIBA Chief Executive Officer, David Hocking.

According to ASIBA, the recent baseline assessment - funded under the NWI by the National Water Commission and based on existing data, which ASIBA claims was flawed in the first place - fails to provide the level of accuracy necessary for good management decisions.

ASIBA says that the government appears to agree with this assessment, given it has acknowledged in its new National Plan for Water Security that: "... *Australia's water information is in poor shape and deteriorating because of diminishing state and territory investments and gross inefficiencies in the way that water information is managed across more than 100 different water data collecting agencies nationwide.*"

"The government has proposed a single management level for administering Australia's water resources. We think this is a sound strategy. But effecting this strategy calls for expert know-how from professionals who properly understand the measurement task and who comprehend the nation's capacity to deliver results in an acceptable time-frame," said Hocking.

"This is where the private sector comes in. Australia can rise to the challenge; it can develop a sound system for measuring and monitoring our water resources. But it's the private sector that will play an essential role in meeting that challenge in a timely manner," he said.

Hocking also says that ASIBA has long advocated engaging the private sector to develop an accurate standards-based measurement model for water resources but that the slow pace of reform and bureaucratic resistance to the private sector has proved frustrating.

He says that ASIBA will, however, continue to talk to government about water resource management issues and will make its views known to both sides of politics in the lead-up to the next Federal Election.

"We will make it very clear that we don't want yet more bureaucracies, pointless programs and other sacred cows swallowing this \$480 million," said Hocking.

"It took a long time to get the government to hear us on this issue. We're not going to go quiet on it now."

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