Our Water - Our Future

Your water licence. Your say.

> *"Responses showed that most people choose to do the right thing most of the time, however, some water licence holders do not comply with aspects of their water licence that they do not understand or that they feel are unnecessary.*
> *In addition there are some users who will take water outside the conditions of their licence if they think there will be minimal impact on the environment or downstream users and if there is minimal risk of being detected.*
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> *Voluntary compliance was seen to be the desired out come at all levels and was thought to be much easier to achieve by the irrigators themselves through greater local control."*

Feedback from water licence holders on the licence compliance requirements showed:
Most licence holders were aware of and respect the allocation description component of their licences. That is;

- Licensed amount of the take,
- Daily take limit.
- Period when taking is permitted.
- The location of the off-take.

Licence holders generally seek to comply with these conditions, although in catchments or seasons when there appears to be adequate water there appeared to be little motivation to be compliant, and certainly no motivation to record data that would demonstrate compliance with licence conditions.

Metering of pumped takes was generally supported as a potentially simple, practical and reasonable method to demonstrating compliance. However, it appeared that the ambivalent commitment by the Department to metering had seriously eroded support by irrigators. In addition, if metering was to be mandated, then there would need to be a simple and robust recording and reporting system, preferably via telemetry.

Stakeholders noted that some meters were not correctly installed, and accreditation of installers was suggested to minimise the likelihood of improper installations.

Monitoring of flows for in-stream dams was seen as complex, often impractical and of little value. A suggested alternative was simply the metering and recording of the volumes of water delivered to crops and fodders (i.e. flows applied by irrigation application equipment).

Compliance requirements other than the four indicated above, were generally not appreciated, considered impractical, in some cases not understood and obviously not enforced, so were generally not respected and were generally ignored. It was considered that if these requirements were necessary, and that was considered only likely in priority catchments (e.g. catchments where the water resource is over-allocated or during droughts), then the compliance requirements needed to be simple, practical, enforced and preferably managed by the local stakeholders. It was very obvious that there was little respect for these compliance requirements that were considered a lower priority, compared with the allocation description components listed above.

Compliance generally was not considered to be a major issue for the environment, and only occasionally for other users (such as downstream irrigators). However, in dry years compliance was considered necessary, and it was considered important that blatant violations be punished. Non-users viewed compliance and potential detrimental impacts on the environment and other users as a much greater issue than water licence holders. This was possibly due to the propensity for "bad" news stories to have a higher profile in media and personal communications, but also because irrigators may have been more focused on protecting "their patch" and thus trying to minimise any issues.

Compliance was likely to be assisted by providing more information to licence holders, through for example, an annual newsletter. It was apparent that irrigators who have been involved in water management planning processes were more aware of the issues, and were more likely to comply with their water licence and conditions. Some strategic enforcement activity in high profile areas was considered to be beneficial in demonstrating the presence and effectiveness of the regulator. While penalties for non-compliance were accepted as a reasonable measure to encourage compliance, it was thought that the penalties should recognise the circumstances (e.g. the consequences of the action on others or the environment), and in severe cases violations should be publicised as a deterrent, particularly for repeat offenders. However, for this to occur violations would need to be identified, substantiated and documented, and this could only occur if the licence conditions could be shown to be reasonable, practical and measurable, and DPIPWE had the resources to collect the necessary evidence. This would appear to be difficult to achieve with conditions that are complex, impractical or simply difficult for anyone to understand.

Most irrigators were aware that there is an impending changing market place with the introduction of the Tasmania Irrigation Schemes and there is a degree of concern in regard to the different operating environment and the potential for an increased focus on regulatory requirements with an increase in irrigation activity. While there was a degree of complacency due to the relatively wet seasons recently and little intervention on the ground in most catchments, compliance issues were thought likely to become a higher priority for stakeholders if the operating environment changed or the resource was under pressure.

There appeared to be a general disconnect between what is being imposed at a policy level and what is practical on the ground. Irrigation water resources were highly variable in the State and the attempt through the water licencing system for generic implementation appeared to be undermining the policy objectives. This has not gone un-noticed by the stakeholders and was possibly the main driver behind the strong message being put forward for self regulation at the local level as it was thought that the local stakeholders understood better the local complexities and could provide tailored solutions to the complex issues. Voluntary compliance was seen to be the desired out come at all levels and was thought to be much easier to achieve by the irrigators themselves through greater local control.

The full report is available on the DPIPWE web site at
http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/WebPages/TTAR-8U579Y?open