



CRC for
Water Sensitive Cities



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A2.2 Accelerating transitions to water sensitive cities through behaviour change
Project leader: Liam Smith

Can water saving behaviours spill over in Australian households through ‘spillover’?

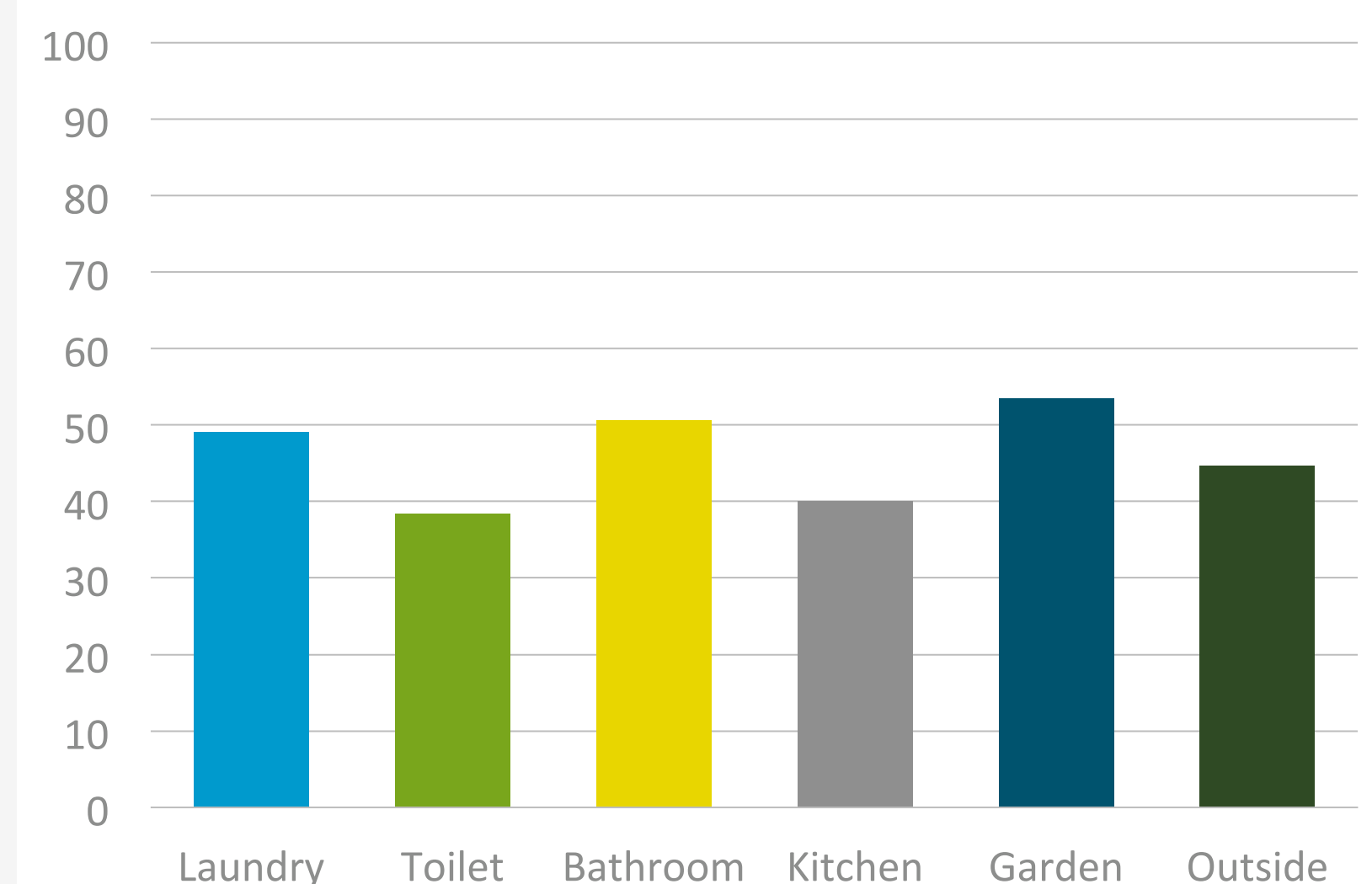
Reducing water demand through spillover

Australia’s varied climate, the impact of climate change and an increasing population means that reducing household water demand will become increasingly important. Most households in Australia (79%) report participation in at least one water saving behaviour (ABS, 2013). It may be possible to leverage off households’ existing behaviours for additional water saving. This leveraging is known as catalytic behaviour change (Austin et al., 2011) or ‘spillover’. So far, the existence of spillover, and the mechanisms behind it, have undergone only limited research (Poortinga et al., 2013). However, if spillover works, it could provide a demand management tool for water managers and policy makers throughout Australia.



Fostering spillover

Researchers propose that spillover, using existing behaviours to lever further behaviour uptake, takes place due to changes in self-perception, increased knowledge or skills (Crompton & Thøgersen, 2009), activation of personal environmental values (Verplanken & Holland, 2002) or through a desire for consistency (Thøgersen, 2004; Thøgersen & Noblet, 2012). The likelihood of spillover taking place is also thought to increase by promoting behaviours that are ‘similar’ to existing practices. Similarity may depend on the type of activity, the location it takes place, the amount of effort involved in participation and so on (Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009; Stern, 2000). By investigating perceptions of similarity of water saving behaviours we can identify key behaviours to target through behaviour change intervention programs.



Early findings: Impacts on perception

To investigate the similarity of water saving behaviours around the home we sent an online survey to 150 householders across Australia. Respondents scored 46 behaviours on the impact they could have on water saving (at an individual and aggregate level) and the physical, mental and financial effort involved in participating. An interesting early result was that householders’ perceptions of the behaviours were affected by their own identity as water savers. People with a higher water saving identity (‘water savers’) saw behaviours as being more impactful and less effortful than those with a lower water saving identity (‘water users’).

Next steps.... Can you help?

We are looking for an industry partner to help identify a field work location and provide access to participants to test behaviour interventions for water savings. Please get in touch if you are interested! Sarah.kneebone@monash.edu

Scores: 1= very low 5 = very high	Average score of behaviours by ‘water savers’	Average score of behaviours by ‘water users’
Water saving if everyone adopts the behaviour	3.47	3.13
Water saving if a household adopts the behaviour	3.42	3.02
Physical effort involved in performing the behaviour	2.59	2.76
Thinking and planning needed to do the behaviour	2.43	2.74
Financial cost of the behaviour	2.68	2.79

Table 1: Differences in perceptions of similarity of water saving behaviours by ‘water savers’ and ‘water users’.

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