

Integrated Research Project 1 — Water Sensitive City Visions and Transition Strategies

Overview

There is a growing international interest by governments, organisations and communities in the liveability, sustainability, productivity and resilience of cities. While there is typically broad agreement about aspirations such as these, decision-makers face the challenge of determining how to most effectively shape and service our cities in order to achieve these outcomes. The Water Sensitive City is the label given to cities where the policies and practices associated with delivering water system services enable these broad liveability, sustainability, productivity and resilience outcomes.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities (CRCWSC) is working to develop innovative tools and methods to address this challenge with a particular focus on guiding and accelerating the transition to water sensitive cities and towns in Australia. The Water Sensitive City Visions and Transition Strategies research project (IRP1) aims to deliver a suite of participatory

methods and associated tools for developing strategic guidance for cities and towns wanting to accelerate their transition towards an envisioned water sensitive future.

The research project involves a series of workshops in multiple case studies across Australia, designed to facilitate open and in-depth discussion amongst key local stakeholders. The workshops will inform the development of a transition strategy for each case study, which will incorporate a benchmark of the city's current water sensitive status, a broad vision for a water sensitive future and an analysis of conditions needed to accelerate the transition from current state to the aspired future state. In selected case studies, an accompanying implementation plan will be developed which outlines specific actions for achieving the vision and operationalising the transition strategy. The figure below details the components of a transition strategy and implementation plan:



The transition strategies will incorporate data from workshop discussions, existing regional initiatives, local stakeholder knowledge and insights from the application of research tools. The CRCWSC is evaluating the processes and patterns of change across the selected case studies to evaluate the effectiveness of the participatory methods, transition strategies and implementation plans in steering policy and practice towards the WSC vision.



Approach

IRP1 has selected five case studies across Australia based on recommendations from the local CRCWSC Regional Advisory Panels. Perth (WA) and Bendigo (VIC) were selected for a full five-workshop process to develop transition strategies and implementation plans, while Adelaide (SA), Townsville (QLD) and Sydney (NSW) were selected for a three-workshop process to develop transition strategies only. The Bendigo case study will also incorporate community perspectives through a series of parallel community workshops. The project will involve the application of tools and processes that were developed in the CRCWSC's first tranche of research.

These include:

1. The Water Sensitive Cities Index tool to benchmark a city's current water sensitive performance,
2. Envisioning and backcasting processes to develop a shared vision and transition strategies for achieving the vision, and
3. Community engagement strategies to help bring the community along the water sensitive transition journey.

Products

The key deliverables for this project will include:

- Transition strategies detailing a benchmark of the current system, contextualised water sensitive city vision, and priority strategies for overcoming key challenges and achieving the vision. Detail and operational focus will depend on the extensiveness of the process.
- Technical reports on 1) a comparative analysis of the contexts, WSC visions, transition strategies, and patterns and drivers of change across the case studies, and 2) strategies for engaging with communities to build their support for water sensitive city transitions
- Process guidelines for participatory envisioning, backcasting, scenario methods, and the use of associated tools, for developing strategic transitions guidance

Benefits

Benefits to the research participants in IRP1 are expected to include:

- In-depth discussions to develop a shared understanding of issues and aspirations across diverse stakeholders who need to collaborate in order to drive water sensitive city transitions
- Influence over the development of a local transition strategy that will steer the future directions for water and planning initiatives
- Tools and products to strengthen strategic planning for achieving long-term water sensitivity.

For further information, visit: <https://watersensitivecities.org.au/content/project-irp1/>

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