

Water Action Coalition (SA)
A UNITED COMMUNITY DEMAND FOR ACTION
Speech by John Caldecott
Convenor WAC Committee

Water is connected and everything is connected through water. It is the reason why we are here today, to launch a movement campaigning for our water and our environmental rights. That movement is called Water Action Coalition or WAC. The WAC movement aims to provide a louder voice to those organisations and their campaigns to achieve water equity for all. Together and as a community we will be standing up for what are basic human rights and a basic right of our ecology to clean water. We will be standing up for the water cycle, for its conservation and sustainability for future generations.

As our Patron Maude Barlow, President of the Council of Canadians and Senior Advisor on Water to the President of the United Nations frequently states - water is a public trust and it is a key element of our Charter being released today. Nobody should own the water of this country. As custodians we have a lot to learn from Aboriginal nations on how to be effective custodians and to respect the water and interdependent ecology.

South Australia today is a state in crisis as evidenced by the campaigns of many of the organisations committed to and supporting WAC.

Never before has an issue provoked such wide debate and concern within communities as governments continue to make decisions based on short term needs rather than holistic solutions. Concerned South Australians are now rallying in increasing numbers to oppose these panic measures and to have their voices heard.

The WAC movement is a demonstration of the determination of a diverse and concerned range of community groups to work together, and with established environmental organisations. Our aim is simply to persuade Governments to respond to community concerns with well considered measures.

The mission of WAC is to ensure a sustainable water future for South Australia. A future that ensures an equitable use of all water resources that does not compromise interdependent ecosystems for future generations.

To achieve these outcomes WAC will forcefully lobby and organise events to publicly advocate for water in all its forms to remain the common property of Australia and its ecosystems. WAC will vigorously pursue legislation by all Parliaments that will:

- Secure all water in its rivers, streams and groundwater as the common property of Australia, to be managed as a common good and not traded as a profitable commodity.
- Deliver viable supply and reuse systems to all communities, city and country, without harm to interdependent ecosystems and the community.
- Ensure that water is managed efficiently and effectively for community use today and conserved for future generations.

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- Respect Aboriginal knowledge of water conservation and healthy water systems, its importance to Australia's oldest culture and to modern water management.

Our aims are clearly explained in our Charter of action that we are releasing today.

We have adopted these actions after listening to pleas from community groups in country towns along the River Murray and in the Lower Lakes. WAC has heard the concerns from those groups in the catchment areas along with the anxious appeals from residents in the suburbs of Adelaide. These concerns are well founded; one of the longest droughts in the history of the Murray Darling Basin is being grossly mismanaged by governments and their agencies. The current crisis is not due to the drought itself but in the management of it.

Many of these concerns were first raised at the Water Summit in March and during the subsequent visit by our patron Maude Barlow.

What is already happening so close to Adelaide in the Murray system is a demonstration of the disaster to come. We are only just beginning to understand the disastrous consequences for Adelaide, yet our politicians are frozen in the headlights.

Already the situation is so serious that it warrants the declaration of a State of Emergency in the Murray-Darling Basin. Further, a Royal Commission is needed into the mismanagement of water supplies by Governments and their agencies. There is strong justification for motions of no confidence in Water Ministers and authorities whose role was supposed to provide guardianship of the ecosystems for future generations but instead now see it as simply to generate profit and growth.

We need laws which will ensure that water from the River Murray is fairly shared. We need Parliament to again strive for laws that commit Governments to water conservation and protection, and affordable access to water for all Australian, not just those with vested interests or the most money.

Immediate legislation is needed for stormwater harvesting and wastewater recycling. We need laws that fund community actions towards rainwater collection and conservation. Our laws must leave enough water in aquifers, rivers and lakes for their ecological health. They must assist us in living in and with nature instead of over it as a path to a water sustainable future. That is our obligation to future generations.

Most of all we must accept that time is running out. What we decide now will decide the fate of generations to come. This commitment to sustained protest has been endorsed by the committee of WAC. Today we begin our protest campaign for change: I thank all of you for your commitment and resolve to achieve a better way.