

Leader of the Opposition
LIA FINOCCHIARO MLA

MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate circulation

Boosting water security to drive industry and grow population a key focus of new Country Liberal Government

A Country Liberal Government will address water security to boost our supplies of drinking water and water for industry use, to drive growth and create jobs and prosperity for the Northern Territory for decades to come, Opposition Leader Lia Finocchiaro said today.

Today, the Country Liberal Opposition is outlining its plans to enhance water security for the Territory, which will include rainwater tank subsidies, ruling out mandatory metering of private rural bores as well as decreasing Power and Water Corporation's drawing from the McMinn's and Howard East bore fields.

Power and Water has estimated that by 2025, we will need to supplement our water supply, just to keep up with demand for drinking water in the Top End. Central Australia, the rural area and our remote communities face similar challenges, which require immediate action.

A Country Liberal Government will:

- Fast-track the construction of a major water infrastructure development* identified by the Federal Government funded Water Infrastructure Business Case Project through the new Office of the Territory Coordinator, and have the project completed within the first term of Government.
- Investigate additional water use and infrastructure projects to supplement water supply in the Territory, including recycling and reuse of greywater, sea water and stormwater for industrial and agricultural uses.
- Subsidise the increased utilisation of rainwater storage tanks in new and existing homes and businesses in order to ease the burden on our current water network (approximately 60 per cent of water use in the Territory is for garden irrigation).
- Rule out mandatory metering on privately-owned rural bores and introduce a bore maintenance education and training program.
- Decrease Power Water Corporation's drawing from the McMinn's and Howard East bore fields to ensure adequate water for residents who use that aquifer.
- Increase water security for Central Australia by investing in expanded use of reverse osmosis and other technologies in conjunction and consultation with communities, homelands and outstations.
- Expand the Living Water Smart program to conserve water and ensure that water waste is lowered to an absolute minimum.
- Work with rural and remote communities across the Territory to address water security and implement innovative ways to ensure that water shortages do not reach the critical level.

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“It’s essential we get our water infrastructure and security right in the Territory. We need to be smarter about how we use, source and store our water,” Mrs Finocchiaro said.

“In Darwin’s rural area where residents rely on groundwater, it’s important we investigate replenishment or other options like tanks and the best management of groundwater, while in regional and remote communities we should investigate the most efficient options to secure water.

“If we don’t get the mix right we can’t hope to grow our population or our mining, manufacturing, agriculture and construction industries which make up 25 per cent of gross state product. The Gunner Government has been weak in letting critical opportunities pass it by.”

In a 2018 report titled *Water resource assessment for the Darwin Catchments*, the CSIRO found that, through targeted infrastructure investment, the Territory could unlock more than 1,000 gigalitres (GL) of useable water. To put this in perspective, the total water consumption for the Territory in 2016-17 was only about 194 GL.

The 2018 CSIRO report identified up to 1 million hectares of potentially irrigable agricultural soils in the Darwin area alone. It also found that investing in water infrastructure could release almost 500 GL for agriculture, adding \$2.3 billion and 2,500 jobs to the economy.

*The Coalition Government has created the \$1.5 billion National Water Infrastructure Fund, which the CLP will fight to access in the future for the construction of water infrastructure projects in the Territory.

In 2019, the CLP was instrumental in obtaining a commitment from the Coalition Government to fund a \$2 million business case for the development of water infrastructure in the Top End (**Water Infrastructure Business Case Project**).

Phase 1 of the Water Infrastructure Business Case Project will identify feasible projects and will be completed later this year. Phase 2, which will be completed in mid-2021, will include the development of a detailed business case for a ‘reference project’ that is selected as part of Phase 1. Based on the outcome of the Water Infrastructure Business Case Project, a clear picture of a shovel-ready project, along with costings and investment criteria, should be developed.

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