



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Key Issues, Recurring Themes, and Recommended Actions

With rapid population growth on the Sunshine Coast, issues related to water consumption, drinking water quality, human effects on aquifers, and protection of aquatic species and habitat are becoming increasingly important. To provide impetus on this key issue, the Sunshine Coast Water Summit was organized. The two-day Summit brought together scientists and water management professionals to exchange knowledge with over 80 local stakeholders and to foster the development of a shared understanding on water issues.

Speaker presentations and breakout sessions allowed participants to explore different crucial areas in drinking water management and, with the help of specialist facilitators, to consider these specifically in relation to the Sunshine Coast. Throughout the meeting, the following questions were used to guide the dialogue: What do we know? What do we need to know? What is missing? What actions are needed to move forward? The overall goal of the Summit was to take the first step in identifying specific aims, objectives and actions required to develop a draft Water Management Framework for the entire Lower Sunshine Coast.

The following key issues were identified:

Hydrology and Scientific Data Collection	<p>Solid scientific data about local climate and hydrology is required on which to base water management decisions and planning.</p> <p>Partnering with university scientists is recommended to help to facilitate data collection and knowledge transfer, and provide additional funding options.</p> <p>There is an immediate and urgent need to develop a strategy to maintain critical flows for fish and people in Chapman Creek during the dry summer period.</p>
Governance	<p>An umbrella agency, with real authority and stable funding, is needed to oversee development of a Water Master Plan and facilitate cooperation and coordination between the many distinct water systems on the Sunshine Coast.</p> <p>Planning must include both short-term pressing concerns and longer-term goals.</p>
Development and Demographics	<p>Efforts must be made to reduce high rates of water consumption on the Sunshine Coast using a combination of education and universal metering.</p> <p>Even if water consumption by existing residents is reduced, overall water demand will continue to rise with increasing development and population growth.</p> <p>A regional growth strategy that incorporates water, sets maximum build-out rates, and identifies future water sources, is urgently needed.</p>
Health and Safety	<p>High arsenic levels in rural wells represent a serious health threat to local residents.</p> <p>Small water purveyors face serious water quality concerns, and lack access to government funding resources for required infrastructure and multibarrier treatment.</p>
Natural Resource Management	<p>There is frustration over the lack of local control over industrial activity, including logging and mining, in drinking water source watersheds.</p> <p>Systemic changes are needed to ensure that fisheries and watersheds receive a higher priority in management decisions.</p>

PRINCIPLES TO MOVE FORWARD

- We have identified pressing issues related to water management on the Sunshine Coast.
- We have developed an analytical framework to guide water management thinking and planning.
- A framework for collaborative action is needed which includes integrated governance and encompasses major stakeholders, including government, industry, scientists, and the public.
- Information is incomplete and solid unbiased science is necessary for good decision-making.
- We must act now on the basis of what we do know and pursue what we don't know.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The following have been identified as the most pressing recommended actions to move the process forward:

- Catalogue existing information, identify gaps, and formulate short- and long-term research questions and data collection strategies to provide sound scientific information to support management decisions.
- Undertake an integrated strategy to identify and obtain stable funding to support research, data collection, water management and planning activities necessary for sound water management on the Sunshine Coast.
- Collaborate with university researchers to undertake a regional water vulnerability study and climate monitoring to produce necessary scientific data to guide water planning.
- Assess summer water storage and supply options, including possibility of pumping from Construction Aggregate wells into SCRD reservoir during critical summer dry periods to increase supply.
- Continue and expand immediate conservation steps (public education, metering) to reduce high water consumption rates on the Sunshine Coast.
- Create an umbrella governing mechanism that is forward-thinking in planning for the Sunshine Coast and is guided by neutral outside consultants to work in an atmosphere of collaboration with stakeholders to create a Water Master Plan that has some long term design and is tied to a timeline.
- Develop an Action Plan for flow levels in Chapman Creek for fish during the summer. The status quo is not acceptable. Undertake a source assessment study and a low flow study of the Creek.
- Develop a regional growth strategy that incorporates water supply and consumption and sets maximum build-out rates, and includes planning for new sources of water as the population grows.
- Undertake source-to-tap risk assessment studies, including response plans. Publicize the findings and act on what is learned. Enable water providers to connect with health authorities more effectively.
- Participate in a Land and Resource Management Planning process (LRMP) to situate water management planning within a larger land and resource management framework.
- Work with industry more proactively to find solutions to water management issues.
- Institute systemic changes so that watersheds receive higher level priority in management decisions.

