28th of January 2020

Stuart McConville
42 McClelland Rd
Barkers Vale 2474

Submission to Federal Government's response to the drought, and the adequacy and appropriateness of policies and measures to support farmers, regional communities and the Australian economy

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to make the following points for consideration with regards to adaptation of policies to guard against climate change and increased likelihood of future severe drought.

Regional communities often rely on potable water sources that have recently been found wanting in many towns and farms. Most households currently use approximately 30% of their drinking water for toilet flushing. Farm septic systems produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Composting toilets can offer a solution to this problem by eliminating the need to flush as well as conserving valuable nutrients and sequestering carbon. Improvements in compost toilet design and accreditation by State agencies ensure that designs are adaptable to modern living and have no odour. I propose that the enquiry make the following recommendation:

R1. Dry composting toilets be subsidised in drought affected areas to enable people to invest in nature based solutions for water conservation and provide an alternative to septic tank waste water treatment.

Investing in the bio-economy will produce long term social, environmental and economic benefits. It is high time the federal government took a leadership role in applying the principles of sustainable development in the face of climate change. My many years of experience shows that if people can be encouraged financially to learn to deal with human by-products in a sustainable fashion the next steps towards sustainability are significantly easier.

R2. That a sustainability entertainment and educational road show be established to tour schools and drought affected communities highlighting water saving technology and sustainable land use practices.

Grey water produced on farms and in regional communities often gets mixed with black water in septic and waste water treatment plants resulting in further contamination of a potentially useful source of waste water.
Source separation of the waste flows i.e. using a compost toilet can ensure that this does not happen and that grey water is available for further treatment and re-use in orchards or for stock watering. Currently policies vary across the states and territories and a nationwide strategy to rectify this would support the waste water industry to cater more specifically for grey water treatment and re-use. Currently in NSW it is still illegal to re-use secondary treated grey water for irrigation of fruit trees or any other above ground use. There is no epidemiological evidence to support this policy and many people ignore it.

R3. That the federal government initiate standardisation of state and territory policies regarding the re-use of grey water for secondary (non-potable) uses. (A good way to achieve this would be to incorporate grey water into the existing standard AS1547:2012)

R4. The federal government subsidise the ecological treatment of grey water to secondary standard (clean but not disinfected) for re-use as fruit tree irrigation or stock water.

Most regional councils do not possess the resources to effectively audit the on-site waste water treatment systems operating in their LGA's. As a consequence, septic system failure and groundwater contamination is all too common in regional towns without sewer. This can lead to bore water contamination and in times of drought where bores are heavily relied upon, public health consequences.

R5. A national audit of un-sewered towns and the potential for ground water contamination by poorly or untreated wastewater.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission. I have had many years experience in the waste water industry and can speak authoritatively regarding these matters. If you should like further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind Regards