

Bottled water ban inevitable

By ANGELA DORIZAS

Environmental campaigners have called on local governments to ban bottled water within their communities and council facilities.

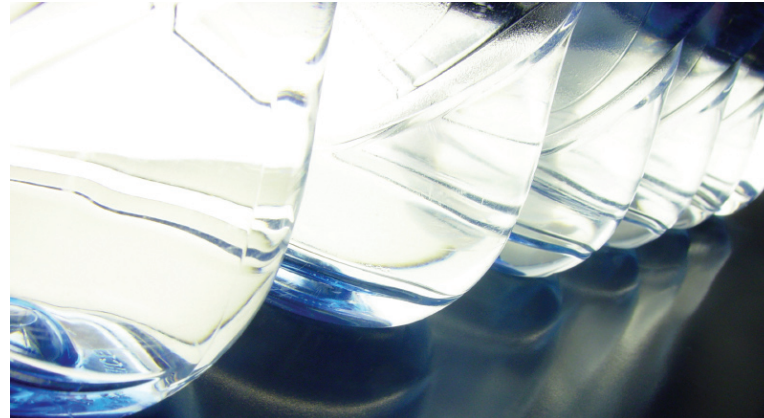
Led by environmental group Do Something, the Bottled Water Alliance has appealed to councils to follow the example of Bundanoon, the New South Wales town set to become the first in Australia to ban bottled water.

From September 26, bottled water will be taken off store shelves and replaced with reusable plastic drink bottles that can be filled up for free in-store or at water filters throughout the town.

The 'Bundy on Tap' campaign was conducted by local businesses and community members, under the direction of Do Something, and had widespread support. When a town hall meeting was convened to vote on the proposed ban 355 of the 356 people that turned up voted in support of it.

Do Something founder Jon Dee said Bundy on Tap provided a model for other towns to follow.

He has already written to all mayors, environment officers and



waste officers at every council in Australia about the Bottled Water Alliance campaign.

"We're currently liaising with about 51 councils interested in the campaign," Mr Dee told *Government News*.

He said a bottled water phase-out required investment in new, vandal-resistant water bubblers, since most Australians did not trust the existing infrastructure.

"We questioned 1000 Australians and found that nine out of ten of them felt that there were not enough quality water bubblers in their local community," he said.

"We also found that 85 per cent of people did not trust the water coming out of the bubblers."

In Bundanoon, Street Furniture Australia supplied new bubblers free of charge and Wingecarribee Shire Council agreed to install and maintain them.

Councils across the country are also phasing out bottled water within their buildings and facilities,

replacing them with more efficient filtered water coolers.

"We've had quite a few councils vote to ban the use of bottled water in council events, council premises and in council facilities."

Adam Cornell, chief executive officer of WaterFirst, said replacing bottled water in the workplace with filtered water coolers could deliver "huge financial benefits".

"If they're using two bottles a week, which would roughly be enough for 10 people in an office, we would save them 45 per cent of their costs," he said.

Mr Cornell said the switch from bottled water to filtered water coolers had delivered savings of up to 85 per cent in some organisations.

"It's inevitable that bottled water, particularly the smaller ones, will be out of all government bodies," he said.

Fact check

- Australians spend more than half a billion dollars a year on bottled water.
- Australia's annual use of bottled water generates more than 60,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions – the same amount that 13,000 cars generate over the course of a year.
- At least 50 million litres of oil is used in the manufacture and distribution of bottled water in Australia every year.
- Australia recycles only 36 per cent of PET plastic drink bottles.

Source: Bottled Water Alliance

Financial realities

Continued from page 5...

In these circumstances, it may well prove necessary to re-direct more of the available federal assistance to rural, remote and Indigenous local councils, and to increase local taxation in larger urban councils in order to reduce their reliance on external support. The Productivity Commission's 2008 study of local government's revenue raising capacity pointed to this option. It sounds politically difficult, but residential property rates in Australia are generally quite low, and the increases involved would rarely amount to more than a few dollars per week and could be phased-in.

The alternative is to confront the prospect of abandoning local government as we know it across much of rural and remote Australia. There are already large 'unincorporated' areas in northern South Australia and western New South Wales, directly administered by state agencies. These might grow, and be joined by much of Western Australia and Queensland, especially if climate change further weakens rural economies. Intriguingly, the Northern Territory government has just taken the opposite direction and established a form of local government over previously unincorporated areas, under which small remote settlements are grouped into 'shires'. That experiment will need to be watched closely.

Whatever the outcome, there is no doubt that some serious policy review and debate needs to take place if Australia is to enjoy a soundly-based and sustainable system of local government over coming decades. This is a key area of work for the new Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government. Now is the time to start.

Graham Sansom is the Interim Director Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government

Slashing GHG emissions

Cities could halve greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions over the next 20 years through targeted strategies similar to the City of Sydney's Sustainable Sydney 2030 plan.

In research commissioned by the City of Sydney, climate change consultancy company Kinesis found that actions outlined in the 2030 strategy had the potential to cut emissions by 540 million tonnes between 2010 and 2030 – the equivalent of Australia emitting zero carbon for a year.

The study also revealed that the strategy had the potential to slash a city's emissions by 48 million tonnes in the year 2030 alone.

The study found that emission reductions through a city-wide scheme would be four times greater than predicted reductions across all Australian buildings under the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS).

Kinesis director and co-author of the report, Bruce Taper, said government needed to look beyond reductions in the GHG emissions of individual buildings.

"Have a look at where you have those unique opportunities within a local government area to do something that's beyond the building footprint," he told *Government News*.

"You need to integrate the private and public space in terms of finding the solution to having large-scale reductions in cities."

Dr Stephen Jones from the University of Queensland UQ Business School is currently examining climate change adaptation and mitigation measures by local government. He said the Kinesis study demonstrated the shortcomings of the CPRS.

"If the modelling has any degree of accuracy then it highlights the inadequacy of the Commonwealth's CPRS to achieve Australia's contribution to reduce GHG emissions and the need for intergovernmental cooperation for policy measures to succeed," he said.

The report recommended that more detailed analysis be conducted by each city using locally available data and development strategies.