

Appendix 2: Water policy draft

Initial Draft: **National Water Resources Policy for the Fiji Islands**

Background and scope of policy

This policy has been developed in recognition of the increasing threats and competing demands for the water resources of the Fiji Islands. Fiji has participated in international and regional discussions about water resources and recognises that water management is important for the social wellbeing of its people, its economic development and the continuing quality of the environment.

This policy covers all freshwater resources of Fiji, both surface water and groundwater, and acknowledges that freshwater can affect the quality of coastal and marine waters.

The policy states goals and principles to guide water management in Fiji, and it identifies the most important elements of water reform to be considered in the next two years.

Water management challenges facing Fiji

In general, the Fiji Islands are blessed with good rainfall and water resources, but the water resources are variable – they are not equally plentiful in all places, nor is water equally available at all times. Some areas, particularly small islands, have very limited water and some areas are drier than others. As well, Fiji has experienced serious droughts from time to time.

Meanwhile, the demand for water is increasing and becoming more complex. Fiji is continuing to develop water sources to provide water for essential domestic needs and water must also be available for agricultural, commercial and industrial enterprises, mining and tourism, to promote the growth of the economy.

Many human activities can affect the quality of water and in Fiji the growth of population and the economy is putting pressure on the quality of water resources. Not only industrial waste and sewage, but other widespread sources of pollution can affect the quality of water and thereby damage native fisheries and aquatic life in streams and rivers. Catchment development, forestry, and agriculture, as well as the growth of urban areas, can all cause the quality of water to deteriorate. Groundwater can be polluted by the infiltration of chemicals which are disposed on the surface of the ground.

Water use is already the subject of some conflict in some cases. Such conflict includes the abstraction of groundwater and activities that could pollute important groundwater reserves. There are emerging surface water use conflicts also in

some locations. Management mechanisms are needed to control the taking of water.

Water bodies need increased protection. Uncontrolled excavation from streams, rivers or groundwater bodies can cause siltation and the release of undesirable chemical compounds from the soil and rocks into the water body.

Finally, the quality of water at the mouth of the larger rivers may affect coastal waters and the important marine life that is so important to Fiji.

The need for a water policy

The pressures on water resources in Fiji will increase in the future in two ways:

- Larger volumes of water will be demanded for water supply and sewerage, as new schemes are built and old ones are upgraded, to meet national targets for providing basic water services;
- Growth in industrial, energy, mining and commercial developments will place greater demand on water.

At the same time, the threats to water quality will increase through:

- increasing urban development,
- more intensive agriculture, forestry and exploitation of natural resources in general, which can have adverse impacts on water quality;
- new industrial and commercial enterprises; and
- more waste disposal which may cause pollution of water.

Fiji needs to ensure that all the activities affecting water are managed in harmony, that there is no serious conflict over access to water, and that all aspects of its management are adequately covered. In the past, there was less demand for water and water resources were not considered to require special legislation or management responsibility. Today the situation is changing.

Fiji, like other countries, needs to conserve its water resources for the future. They are variable but also finite and limited. Therefore an active and consistent approach to water is needed. This policy is an early step towards that end result, along with interim legislative changes.

Government response

The Government is responding to the water challenges by embarking on a water management reform program to:

- strengthen the water management capabilities that already exist;
- introduce new water management measures where these are considered necessary.

A first step is the development of this policy which:

- clearly states the Government's goals for water resources in Fiji;
- provides the principles by which water resources should be managed in Fiji, and

- sets out the major steps towards creating an effective regime for managing water resources.

Water management goals

The following goals should guide the management and use of the nation's water resources:

1. to achieve water supply and sanitation service objectives (consistent with the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Water Management)
2. to ensure the sustainability of water by managing it as a renewable but finite resource;
3. to ensure water use is as efficient as possible and that wastefulness is minimised;
4. to allocate water to all types of use as effectively as possible with the minimum of conflict between water users;
5. to facilitate access to water, for the promotion of economic development;
6. to maintain the quality of water in water bodies, for beneficial uses and the environment;
7. to protect water bodies from physical damage which will harm the quantity or quality of their water;
8. to ensure the water needs of the environment are met, so that aquatic ecosystems are maintained;
9. to lessen the impacts of extreme events – flood and drought – by applying appropriate plans and measures;
10. to ensure that freshwater outflows into coastal waters do not cause unnecessary harm to coastal and marine ecosystems.

Water management principles

Water resources in Fiji should be managed according to the following principles:

Nature of water resources and the role of Government

- Freshwater resources, both surface water and groundwater are recognised as critical for human wellbeing, to provide for the economic growth of Fiji and to maintain the value of the natural environment;
- Water resources are finite and water sources can be exhausted or damaged: therefore water must be managed within sustainable limits for today and for future generations, to protect the long term quantity and quality of water in natural water bodies;
- The effective management of water must be on the basis of the hydrologic unit - meaning, for surface water, the catchments of streams and rivers and for groundwater the aquifer system: only in this way will the impacts

of water exploitation in any location be adequately recognised and responded to;

- Surface water and groundwater are part of a unified water cycle and should be managed consistently as elements of the water resources of Fiji;

Therefore, the Government must have the capacity to exercise comprehensive management control over the flow of water and the use of water resources.

Water conservation and efficiency

- Water conservation is an important objective for Fiji: therefore water use should be efficient and wastefulness should be discouraged by appropriate incentives and measures;
- Opportunities for water reuse, recycling and research should be investigated and, where appropriate, adopted and encouraged;
- Water use efficiency plans are needed to develop strategies for conserving water resources in all sectors.

Water allocation and priority of use

- Water supply for domestic use should be given priority in times of water scarcity;
- Water requirements to maintain the environment and its important aquatic features will be investigated and where necessary provided for.
- In order to promote economic development, a system of water allocation should be developed to give secure water entitlements to water users who take significant volumes of water, and have made substantial investments in infrastructure which support the Fiji economy.

Water quality protection

- Water sources of good quality must be protected from depletion and pollution by adequate protection mechanisms, consistent with the rights and interests of those who may be affected.
- The control of point sources of pollution of water must be applied comprehensively to ensure that receiving waters in Fiji are protected from all artificial discharges, including sewage and discharges from industry and mining.
- Measures for controlling water quality degradation from non-point sources, such as soil erosion and catchment activities need to be strengthened.
- Small scale and fragile water sources (such as shallow island aquifers) which have value for drinking and domestic use should receive particular attention for their protection;
- The impact of rivers on the quality of coastal waters should be recognised and investigated and, where necessary, measures taken to prevent coastal degradation.

Financial

- Water services should be as financially independent as possible, provided that the cost of water for basic needs of society is affordable;
- Those water users who take and use significant volumes of water should contribute to the costs of water management;
- Water exported from Fiji may be subject to royalties.

Water services

- Major public water supplies are being placed on a commercial footing to encourage efficient management.
- Large public water and sanitation schemes should be subject to similar water management conditions and protection as private enterprises in regard to:
 - access to water resources, and allocation of water entitlements to them;
 - control of their sewage or other discharges to prevent pollution of water bodies.

Water reform measures

In order to meet the goals and principles in this policy, the Government will initiate a series of water resources reforms, as follows:

Water legislation

The Government will investigate the requirements for water legislation in order to:

- establish the required mechanism to allocate water which:
 - gives water entitlements to all types of use,
 - avoids or minimises conflict over water access,
 - gives water users greater certainty of access to water for their requirements,
 - enables sustainable levels of water exploitation to be maintained;
- clarify the legal status of water users and all parties that rely on water or are affected by its condition and use;
- recognise those benefits of water to which owners of native land should be entitled and ensure that they receive appropriate value;
- include coverage of areas of water management not adequately included in current legislation;
- establish a judicial mechanism to resolve conflict associated with water allocation and use.

Institutional strengthening

The Government will:

- establish a coordinating body with secretariat support at national level, to provide consistent advice on water reform and water management problems of national significance;
- strengthen the coordination arrangements between water use sectors and the various administrative units that deal with water resources;
- assign responsibility for water resources management within the administration and build up its capacity in relevant areas.

Education and awareness

The Government will improve public understanding about the importance of water and dangers to its quality by developing education and awareness programs on water resources policy and management.

Water resources information

Sound water management relies on comprehensive and reliable information and understanding of water resources: The Government will:

- identify the technical information needs for present and future water management at national level;
- ensure that responsibility for collecting and maintaining water resources information is clearly allocated to the appropriate organisations.