

RAINWATER TANKS AND STORM WATER – FACT SHEET

Snapshot

Rainwater tanks have a long history of use in Australia, especially in many rural areas which often depend upon them for household water. In recent years, there has been an upsurge in rainwater tank installations in towns and cities. There are several reasons for this: water restrictions, state or local government policies (including rebate schemes), and home owners' personal choice.

The National Water Commission has published a study that helps people evaluate the cost effectiveness of rainwater tanks for households in urban Australia. Findings showed that the costs and reliability of tanks for households vary dramatically depending on the location and individual household circumstances.

Issues to consider

- The yield from a rainwater tank depends on various household factors — for example, the size of the roof collection area, the tank capacity, the local rainfall situation, and the amount of tank water used around the home.
- Water from rainwater tanks can be used for outdoor garden use and/or in the home, and the decision on how it is going to be used will influence the tank's yield and costs.
- Installing a rainwater tank may cost a 'typical' property owner between \$500 and \$4000 over the lifetime of the tank, depending upon individual circumstances.
- The cost of installing rainwater tanks reduces the costs associated with repairing and replacing the existing stormwater system, and reduces the amount of pollutants entering urban rivers and streams.
- Rainwater tanks can also help reduce annual water bills and can be used to offset the effects of water restrictions.
- In areas of poor quality water, rainwater can improve the taste of drinking water.
- There is also the broader community benefit of promoting conservation and water-wise behaviour at the household level.
- Whilst rainwater tanks offer a supplementary water supply option for a growing number of households around Australia, larger-scale stormwater harvesting and reuse can supplement the normal water supply for urban communities.
- The volume of stormwater runoff from a city is often greater than its entire combined household water use, and has the potential to provide water for irrigating parks, gardens and ovals, as well as replenishing groundwater supplies. Use of stormwater for these purposes can help to take pressure off the potable (drinking) water supply.

The Australian scenario

Many projects around Australia are demonstrating the value of regional-scale stormwater harvesting and reuse. For example, the Waterproofing Northern Adelaide project is collecting and cleansing stormwater in urban wetlands and aquifers, and in Western Australia stormwater is replenishing the Cottesloe aquifer.