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Session 8A, ‘Water Efficiency’

TWENTY 65 Conference 2017

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Misbehaviour, attitudinal problems and unpredictability:

The challenges and limits of water customerisation

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Key Point

This talk looks at some discourses on **CUSTOMERS** In the water industry and contrasts the expectations of the customer role compared that of **CITIZENS.**

Key argument: an over-emphasis on the customer is obscuring other actual and potential user/provider relationships

The Handout summarises various user models.

This talk mainly looks at first two rows.

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Background

- This talk is based mainly on:
- A study in the middle of the Millennium Drought (mid-2000s) on how the Sydney Water Corporation conceptualised household water users and vice versa.
- A research project just after the drought (2010-11) on how metropolitan water managers in 5 Australian states related to social research and the social dimensions of water sustainability.

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Sydney Water 'User Models' study

- The Water Board became Sydney Water Corporation in 1994 and the long drought set in just a few years later.
- **Supply side management** required simple models of **'average users'** and **'general publics'**.
- **Demand management** requires more detailed knowledge of people and water practices.
- Neoliberal policies and corporatisation encouraged importation of a commercial user model to the water sector: the user as **'customer'**.
- Social theorists **were not** employed to develop user models specific to water, which unlike most commodities is an unsubstitutable vital element, often delivered to people via unchosen infrastructures.

Customerisation – neoliberal makeovers that turn people into customers

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INSTITUTION	PEOPLE	VALUE
School, University	Students	Learning, 'Enlightenment'
Welfare agency	Recipients, Beneficiaries	Equity, compassion, fair go
Library	Readers	Access to culture, information
Hospital	Patients	Health
Trains, planes, buses	Passengers, travellers	Mobility, access
Water authority	Residents, population	Public health
ANYTHING	**CUSTOMERS**	**FEE FOR SERVICE**

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‘User models’

Each way of thinking about water users – each **‘user model’** – brings with it a set of assumptions about:

- what capacities users have
- what they can and should do
- what sorts of relationships they might or ought to have with water providers, and water infrastructures and fixtures.

‘User models’ matter because they enable—or can limit – what options and strategies are imaginable for changing water cultures and technologies.

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‘User models’ often implicit

To identify the model of users implied by a program, ask:

- What kind of **person** is this strategy targeting?
- What kinds of personal, informational, technical, practical **faults or gaps** is the approach trying to remedy?
- Who is held **responsible** for making the needed change?

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Example of User Model – the ABC approach

Attitudes → **B**ehaviours→**C**hoices (e.g. for water-efficient devices)

The user-blaming 'ABC' approach (Shove 2010) favoured by technocrats relies on influencing individual consumption choices in order to bring change. Attitudes are surveyed to identify ways to change or predict customer behaviour.

Implied user:

- has bad attitudes or deficient knowledge;
- misbehaves when it comes to water;
- makes poor consumer choices
- is hard to predict.

User sounds like a **teenager** seen from an authoritarian position.

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Clash of User Models – Customer Behaviour vs Community Engagement

Media campaigns and community consultation functions are often grouped together in water companies, but not at one in Melbourne.

Int 1: I don't get involved in the **social change** [=behavioural change campaigns] area. […]The sort of frameworks I use are around **decision making and participatory democracy**. […] [W]e have a certain ethic around actually not influencing people, rather, giving them the information for them to make up their own minds about things.

Int 2: With the **engagement** you are giving people choices and allowing them to have their views on what they think is the best direction.

Whereas I suppose the process we've done with **water conservation** is we [= water company] **want to get a desired outcome** – which is reduce usage of a particular resource – and trying to look at different strategies to be able to do that.

Clash of the User Models:
Customer Behaviour vs Community Engagement

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	CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
USER MODEL	Customer (ABC model)	Citizen, community member, participant
CO'S AIM	To reduce water use	To have a democratic process; gain social licence to operate.
MEANS	Persuade customer to change their behaviour	Inform, listen, learn
USER CAPACITY	Customers need to be told what to do	Participants intelligent, can make up own minds
RELATIONSHIP	Top-down, paternalistic	Participatory, consultative
POLITICS	DAD: Decide, Announce, Defend	PEP: Profile, Educate, Participate

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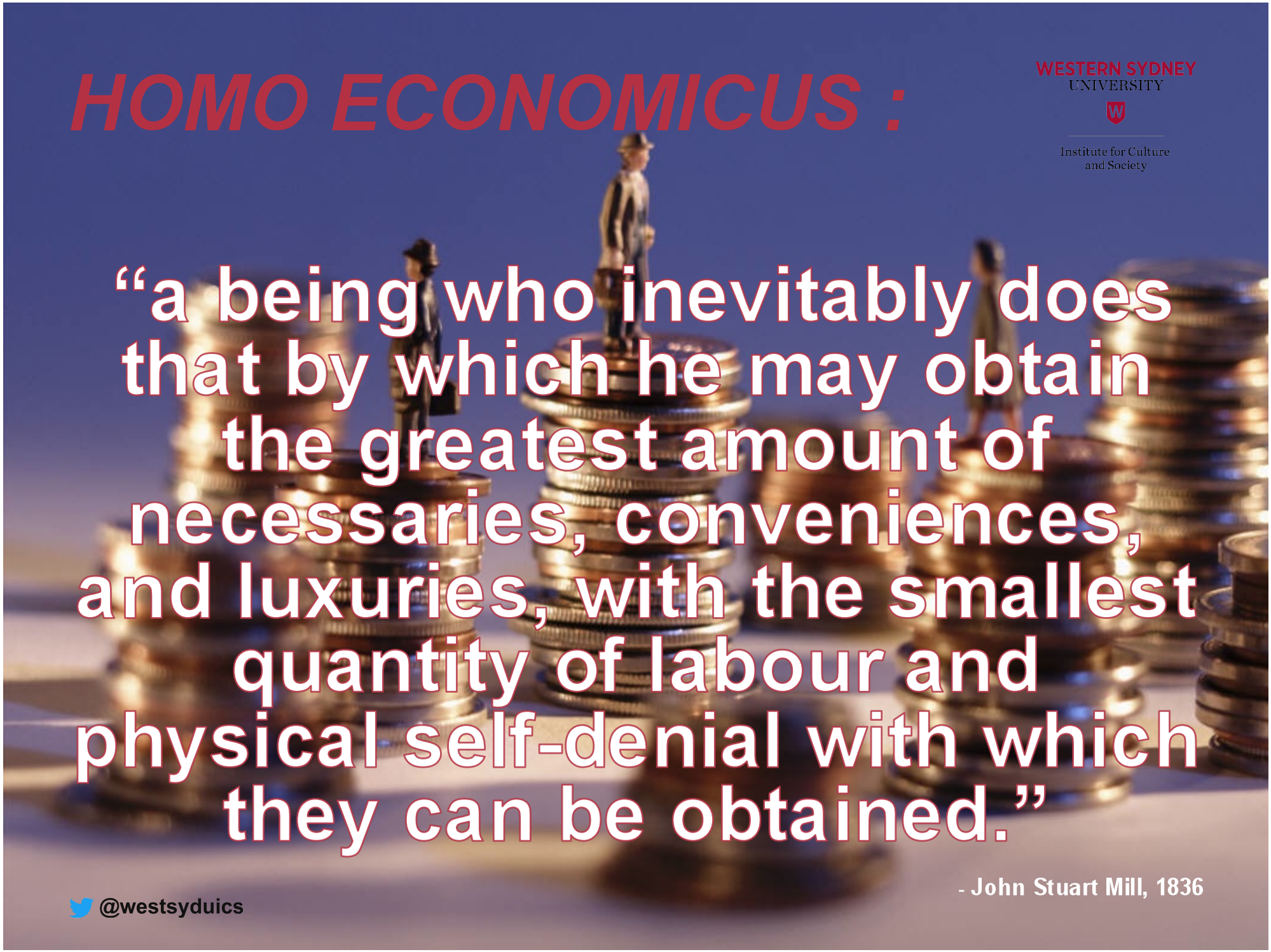
Water Customisation Assumptions

Mistaken assumptions include that when water utilities were corporatized:

- Water became wholly a commodity
- Water users all became customers
- The role of ‘customer’ adequately described how people related to water and water providers
- That somehow people got customer choice
- That other relations to water and providers were superceded


HOMO ECONOMICUS :
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"a being who inevitably does that by which he may obtain the greatest amount of necessaries, conveniences, and luxuries, with the smallest quantity of labour and physical self-denial with which they can be obtained."
- John Stuart Mill, 1836
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Symptoms of Customerisation

• Insistence on the word 'customer' for all water users

Ignores how water is supplied to houses not people, and how few householders are bill-paying customers. Children, teenagers, visitors, some elderly, plants and pets and renters may **consumer** water without being **customers**.

• Social research based on marketing topics and methods

e.g. Willingness to pay, the elasticity of water demand vis a vis water pricing, least-cost approach to water savings, financial incentives to adopt water-efficient devices, detailed demographics to identify 50+ market segments; studies of public trust, brand reputation etc.

• Expectation that consumers will act like *homo economicus.*

•Surprise when people act and sacrifice some personal benefits for the sake of a common good, especially in drought.

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Limits of Customerisation (1)

- Despite predominance of customer model, other concepts persisted:

Public, voters, citizens, taxpayers, community, residents.

- Most householders contacted felt okay about being 'customers', some strongly objected while others wanted new roles.

*"I am comfortable with being a **consumer** of water. I have to be in order to live. I would like to be also a '**collector**' of water, given the means for it and the times we live."* Rosa, Sydney resident

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Limits of Customerisation (2)

Homo economicus / customer model did not predict:

- Willingness to obey outdoor water restrictions
- Voluntary indoor water-saving (e.g. ↓flushing, → sewerage problems)
- High uptake of rainwater tanks, even without applying for rebates.

"And anyone that's ever put in a rain-water tank, it's uneconomical. You would not put in a rain-water tank if you were thinking about money, you just wouldn't." – Research Manager Q, Melbourne

Challenges of Customerisation (1): Entitled Customers vs. Responsible Citizens

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Contradiction between:

- customer's entitlement to consume as much water as they choose to pay for
- campaigns exhorting citizens to save water for the common good during drought.
- 'Go Slow on the H2O' and 'Every drop counts' address responsible citizens, not merely self-serving customers.

Sydney WATER

Pro-saving water providers (e.g. Sydney Water)

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There are many easy ways you can help the environment by saving water.
Use the following suggestions to save even more water in your home.

WATER SAVING IDEAS FOR YOUR BATHROOM

- **SHOWERHEADS**
  A simple change like installing a AAA-rated showerhead could save your household around $100 in water and energy costs every year.
- **TAPS**
  Install AAA-rated water efficient taps and consider lever and mixer models. AAA-rated taps use 50% less water than standard tap fittings. Always replace leaking washers and turn taps off gently to make the washers last longer.
- **TOILETS**
  Install a AAA-rated dual flush toilet so that you can choose to flush only half of the cistern's water. AAA-rated toilets use around 67% less water than a standard single flush

WATER SAVING IDEAS FOR YOUR LAUNDRY

- **WASHING YOUR CLOTHES**
  Washing machines that have a load adjustment should be set to match the load of clothes. If you can't adjust your machine, wait until you can do a full load if possible.
- **BUY A AAA-RATED WASHING MACHINE**
  When looking for your next washing machine, consider buying a AAA-rated front loading machine. They use 63% less water than standard top loading machines and use less energy and detergent.

WATER SAVING IDEAS FOR YOUR KITCHEN

- **HAND WASHING DISHES**
  Rinse dishes in a plugged sink rather than

Pro-consumption policy promoters: Australia's Productivity Commission

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This powerful policy group promulgates neoliberalism —and would like everyone and everything, including the environment and waterways—to be customers of the water industry.

It has criticised Oz water companies for being too holistic about sustainability.

> "Consumer choice is economically superior to restrictions. Those with a preference to restrict their water usage should be able to do so, but this should be voluntary.
>
> Those preferring to use more water should not have to put aside their preference for greater water consumption" - PC 2011, 191.

Challenges of Customerisation (2): Misrecognition of Motives

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Misalignment between:

- the economic motives attributed to water customers
- people's actual (altruistic) values for water-saving.

Insulting to assume people only save water to save money when they do it to save precious water.

Other reasons given include:

- 'Doing one's bit' for a common effort
- environmental or climate concerns
- intergenerational equity.

Challenges of Customerisation (3): Wasted human energy and resources

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Ignoring people's non-financial motives for water-saving spurns instead of celebrating and mobilising altruistic collective energies that can enable change more radical than efficiency gains:

- making sacrifices (e.g of gardens)
- abandoning old /inefficient water practices
- adopting new /different ones

… as part of communal efforts for a common good of water sustainability.

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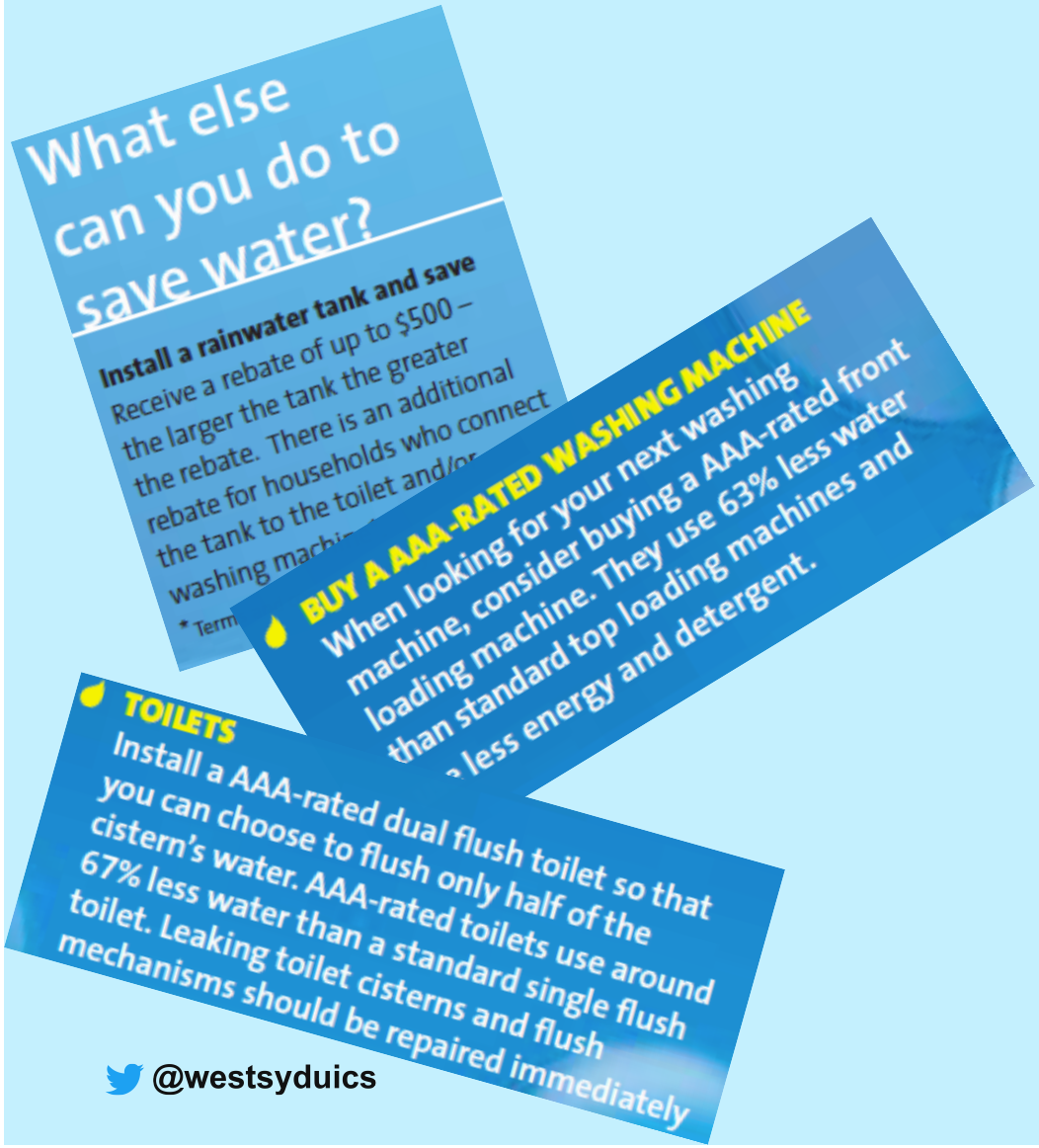
Responsibilising Users 1: The Green Consumer or Citizen-Consumer



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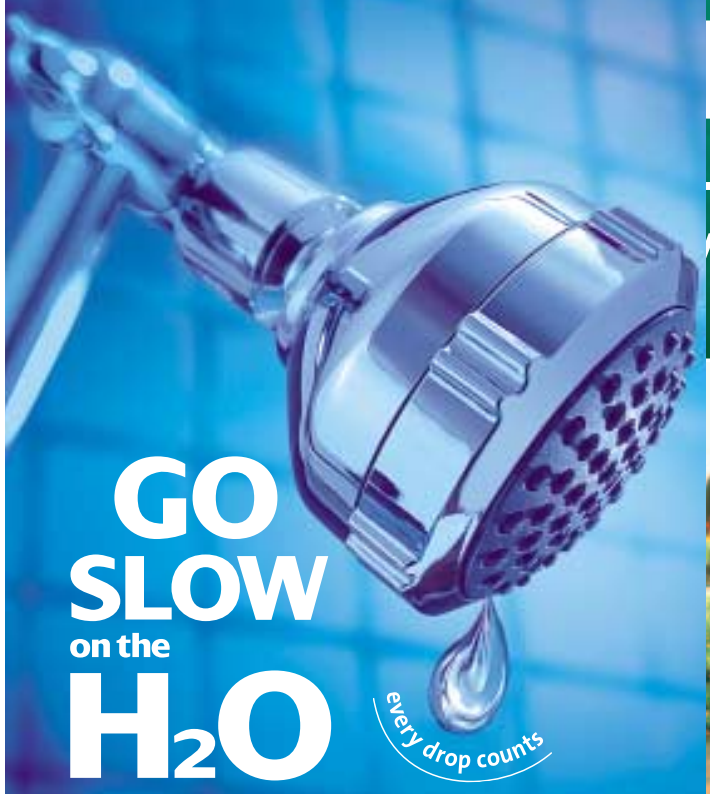
The '**Citizen-consumer**' - 21st century consumer aspiring to more ethical forms of consumption, or use brands that support particular causes.

The '**green consumer**' is constructed in marketing campaigns to get customers to "**make the green the brand of choice**" (Shove, and acquire more efficient appliances, etc.

During the drought, many rebates and incentives were on offer.

Sydney WATER



GO SLOW on the H_2O

every drop counts

Save over $110#

We'll **replace** your old showerhead with a **brand new one** for just **$22**

Refer to the table on page 5 for an explanation of typical retail costs of this special offer.

Sydney WATER

FREE

Landscape assessment, valued at up to $165

The Landscape Asse
households who wis
assessment includes

- An assessn
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- Guidance
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WASHING MACHINE REBATE $150

(LIMIT 1 PER PROPERTY)

→ Eligible washing machines must be 5 star water (WELS) and 4 star energy rated. Washing machines must be for domestic use.
→ Available for 12 months (finishing 30 June 2012).

Sydney WATER

$100 REBATE on selected water-efficient WASHING MACHINES*

For a limited time, Sydney Water is offering customers a $100 rebate to purchase a 4A or 5A-rated** water-efficient washing machine.

Washing machines are the third largest consumers of water in your home.

By choosing a water-efficient model, you will help save water, money and protect the environment.

For more information, and an application form, ask in-store or visit Water Conservation & Recycling at www.sydneywater.com.au.

GO SLOW on the H_2O

* Terms and conditions apply. For details ask in-store or visit our website at www.sydneywater.com.au. Offer valid from 5 June 2003 to 31 July 2003.

** As rated under the National Water Conservation Labelling and Rating Scheme.

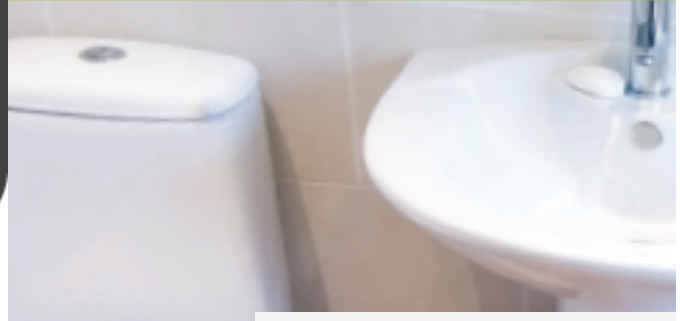
our environment it's a living thing

L-FLUSH TOILET ATE $100

ER PROPERTY)

acement of a single flush or less water dual-flush toilet.

ual-flush toilet uses 3 litres of water h, 6 litres or less on a full flush. must be installed by a licensed plumber. for a replacement toilet only. are not eligible.



HOT WATER RECIRCULATOR REBATE $150

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Responsibilising Users 2: The Rational Consumer

The rationalism of *homo economicus* is emphasised in this user model, also called **'Resource Man'** or a **'micro-resource manager** (Yolande Strengers), or **'Mini-Me'** (Zoë)

Mini versions of STEM experts and resource economists, they use data to rationally calculate household resource consumption.

Smart energy or water meters that provide real-time quantitative data on usage and costs construct this kind of user.

Table 1: Different levels of participation

Type of Participation	Characteristics of Participation	User Model
1. Passive participation	People told what is going to happen or has already happened. Unilateral announcement by an administration or project management, sharing information that belongs to external professionals.	HISTORICAL
2. Participation in information giving	People answer questions posed by extractive researchers, e.g. questionnaire surveys. No opportunity to influence proceedings—research findings not shared or checked with sources.	HISTORICAL
3. Participation by consultation	People consulted by external professionals who listen to their views. External people define problems and solutions, and may modify these post-consult. No share in decision-making. Professionals not obliged to take views on board.	HISTORICAL
4. Participation for material incentives	People provide resources—for example labour, or use of their farmland, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. (Could apply to rebates and incentives for water efficiency devices.) No stake in prolonging activities when incentives end.	RATIONALIST
5. Functional participation	People form groups, perhaps according to an external template, to meet project objectives. Involvement usually begins after the major decisions have been made. Groups tend to be dependent on external initiators, but may become self-dependent.	RATIONALIST
6. Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones. Often uses interdisciplinary methodologies, multiple perspectives, structured learning processes. Groups can control local decisions, so people have stakes in maintaining structures or practices.	INTEGRATED
7. Self-mobilisation	People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. May have contact with, or support from, external institutions but retain control over how resources are used. May or may not challenge existing inequitable distributions of wealth and power.	INTEGRATED

Source: Based on Reid *et al.* (2009, 24), with third column added from Sofoulis and Strengers (2011); see Appendix 2.

iap2 public participation spectrum

developed by the international association for public participation

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advise and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	• Fact sheets • Websites • Open houses	• Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings	• Workshops • Deliberate polling	• Citizen Advisory committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making	• Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions

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