

MINISTER'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORUM
SEPTIC TANK EFFLUENT DISPOSAL SCHEME

July 2003

Background

The provision of the septic tank effluent disposal scheme (STEDS) is a shared responsibility of State and Local Government, and is a fine example of State and Local Government working together effectively for the direct benefit of local communities

A review of the funding, procurement and technology options of the STEDS program was conducted in 2002 by the LGA in close co-operation with the State Government and contained input from stakeholders including the EPA, SA Water, OLG, DWLBC, DEH, DHS and PIRSA. Findings of *The Review of STEDS in South Australia* included:

- Demand for new STEDS is estimated by the LGA at a cost of \$126 million to complete. Delivery time for these schemes is estimated to be 20 years.
- The review identifies demand from localities not currently included in surveys, but that could benefit from a STED scheme, at a cost of a further \$44M.
- As these amounts gauge the cost of new schemes only, and do not consider the cost of maintaining or replacing existing schemes, the review estimates that total necessary expenditure could be as high as \$300M. Accurate predictions as to the future costs of STED schemes are difficult due to the changing regulatory and pricing climate.
- It is currently accepted by stakeholders that service provision for the STEDS Program is the responsibility of the public sector. However, there are no detailed policy objectives for the Program at State Government level.
- Regulatory standards, particularly environmental regulation, for the treatment of wastewater are currently changing, and could have significant impact on the future maintenance and replacement costs of existing STEDS.
- The Program places a strong emphasis on re-use opportunities. Currently nine million litres (the equivalent to nine full size olympic swimming pools) of treated STEDS effluent is re-used each day across the state for irrigation of town commons, sports grounds, golf courses, crops and wood lots. The opportunity exists to retrofit the remaining (existing) schemes to re-use an additional nine million litres per day to further reduce demand on existing water supplies.

Current Status

- Following on from the *Review of STEDS in South Australia* the LGA has gained endorsement from its most recent General meeting (of all councils) to implement an action plan for reform to STEDS. This includes the establishment of a STEDS Advisory Committee to facilitate the progression and implementation of the recommendations of the Review. The LGA is in the process of writing to the Minister responsible for STEDS, the Minister for Administrative Services, asking for three nominees from State Government for the committee and for clarity regarding funding beyond 2003-04, particularly in view of the fact that funding for 2003-04 decreased to \$3.05M from \$4.0M. The LGA is seeking timely advice to enable the committee to commence and provide a progress report to the LGA AGM in early October.
- The LGA is keen to progress reforms in order to ensure the sustainability of existing schemes and to reduce the current waiting time of at least 20 years for the installation of new schemes under the current STEDS Program.
- STEDS is the responsibility of the Minister for Administrative Services, and has strong connections to the portfolios of the Minister for Local Government and Regional Affairs and the Minister for Environment and Conservation. All of these Ministers are members of the Minister's Local Government Forum.

Recommendation

That the Forum:

1. Note the report and endorse the proposed establishment of a joint State – Local STEDS Advisory Committee to facilitate reform;
2. Provide resource support from the Office of Local Government to assist the joint Advisory Committee, in particular, progressing State Government input in a timely and co-ordinated manner given that there are several State Agencies with an interest in STEDS.
3. Receive a progress report at the next meeting from the Advisory Committee for further discussion as appropriate.