

WATER PLANS ARE ALL WET

Melbourne Water's announcement that it proposes to continue the move away from rates based on property values (to a so-called "user-pays" system) is an atrocious decision.

Within the existing metropolitan area, private tracts of land are still being held out of use.

There is little incentive for their owners to play the game – that is, to compete – so, they hold land out of use at their whim, until it can be sold at a suitably speculative price.

Melbourne Water apparently doesn't realise that these dead pockets add massively to social and infrastructural costs, as new development is required to "leapfrog" over them.

It is obviously the intention to continue to reward these vacant landholders (as currently under the NAV rating system) on the shallow pretext that they use little or no water.

Melbourne Water should not need reminding that water falls freely out of the sky.

What we have to pay for are the dams, reservoirs, and mains – which collect and distribute our water.

As Melbourne's population grows, or as we waste water, there are clearly greater demands on this infrastructure but Melbourne Water's charging system in no way gets to grips with the greatest cause of escalating costs – massive urban sprawl into our hinterlands created by the inefficient use of land.

Melbourne Water and the State Government should have their eyes opened to the timeless equity of site value rating – where we *all* have to pay on the basis of the land we hold. Under this system the "non-users" pay their fair share for water services which pass their land and add to its value. In the process, the vast majority of us would have far-smaller water bills.

Melburnians are justly proud of our water engineering feats, but the new charging system is social engineering at its worst.

Bryan Kavanagh,
Glen Waverley.
"Herald/Sun", 13/4/92.