

Sold Down the River - Four Corners 2003

Topic: Water trading

For decades farmers have been encouraged to irrigate but the increasing pressure on the river systems is seeing water as a commodity. This episode looks at water trading from a range of perspectives.

The episode runs for 45mins. It can be purchased from ABC program sales

<http://www.abc.net.au/programsales/s1122561.htm>

As you watch consider noting the factors involved as they are presented by the various stakeholders. Consider the past, the present and the future.

Write the factors as headings and students can list examples.

Social factors

Examples:

Communities established because irrigation was available

Farmers may have to move

Communities need to be convinced change is beneficial

As water right is sold, expertise will leave the community

Communities don't want less water for farming

More difficult for farmers to borrow from banks as water rights are uncertain

Historical factors

Examples:

Dam building in the 40s and 50s encouraged water allocation

Water licenses were easy to obtain

Price has always been very low for water

We have become used to product costs including only a low cost for water

Environmental factors

Examples:

Water not reaching the sea

Need for control of water use

Natural flooding regime needed

Water savings should go to the river

Rationing is in option

80% of water is taken

Is the drought man-made?

Need research into improvement

Economic factors

Examples:

Farmers want the same amount of water

Water is a valuable commodity

Farm loses value when water right goes

Water makes the farms viable

Farmers can make savings

Pipes would reduce evaporation

Water savings could mean more water for farms

Environmental flow is media hype

Water should have a price as this would lead to increased efficiency (eg. graziers selling water to fruit growers)

Speculators emerging

Political factors

Examples:

Water is being kept back

Cap now in place

Big task – details hard to find

Competing forces, who are all voters