

Dam project lays ground for sustainability rating

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THE ACT's \$363 million enlarged Cotter Dam project is close to piloting the world's first infrastructure sustainability rating scheme more than a year before the scheme's planned introduction.

The dam project, an initiative from ACTEW Corporation, aims to increase existing capacity by 20 times, from four gegalitres to 78GL, in a bid to secure the region's water supply. Work is expected to start later this year with a completion target of 2011.

The sustainable infrastructure rating scheme from the Australian Green Infrastructure Council is in the final approval stages for the project, even though the rating scheme is still on the drawing board.

Progress on its development has stalled, awaiting funding from federal and state governments before it can be finalised and officially launched.

However, consultants keen to get ahead of the game are already including the rating tool in their tenders, highlighting the importance being placed by the industry on incorporating sustainability considerations into infrastructure projects.

AGIC chairman David Hood says he receives calls every week from infrastructure design and construction companies that want to include AGIC guidelines in their tenders, making them eligible for a rating once the tool is released. The rating tool is expected to be employed as a national guideline and to become a tender requisite for all public infrastructure projects. Compliance with requirements will be awarded the AGIC sustainability endorsement.

GHD, the engineering and sustainability consultant on the Cotter Dam project, is managing the development of the rating scheme for AGIC. GHD sustainability consultant Andrew Griffiths believes employing the scheme can give competitive advantage to a tender.

"The decision-makers at ACTEW were fairly proactive in developing sustainability proposals," Griffiths says. "Our background with AGIC and involvement in developing the rating tool was certainly an advantage and we recommended using the AGIC categories in the implementation plan."

"They liked the idea and are in the process of approving the AGIC categories for more sustainable infrastructure."

AGIC estimates industry contribution to the scheme has already topped \$2.5m worth of time and effort in developing the seven categories and 27 subcategories that constitute the guidelines. The seven categories of the rating scheme are: project management and governance; economic performance; using resources; emissions, pollution and waste; biodiversity; people and place and

workforce. The project, which is an infrastructure equivalent to the Green Star or National Australian Built Environment Rating System rating schemes on commercial buildings, is waiting for the green light on \$600,000 of requested funding from the federal government.

State governments, which have each been asked to stump up \$130,000 of funding, are also on pause, waiting for federal commitment before signing up.

"It is encouraging that tenders are already being placed using the AGIC rating framework as a competitive advantage," Hood says. "It shows how much demand there is for sustainable guidelines in the industry. This scheme will be an ideal framework to make sure infrastructure is delivered and operated in a sustainable manner."

"But government funding is essential and decisions need to be made sooner rather than later. The industry has already committed over \$2.5m towards the establishment of the scheme and the government now needs to recognise its role too."

Federal Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Minister Anthony Albanese's office says it is investigating ways of making funding available to the scheme.

"AGIC has presented its proposal to the government," an Infrastructure Australia spokesperson says. "[Its] funding request was considered through the Infrastructure Australia process [for funding from the Building Australia Fund] and was not successful."

"Sustainability is an important part of long-term infrastructure investment. That's why the government has taken a triple bottom line approach to infrastructure decision making. That is, proposals have been and will continue to be assessed by Infrastructure Australia on their economic, social and environmental merits." In close alignment with the IA, the infrastructure rating scheme similarly seeks to evaluate infrastructure projects according to their "economic, social and environmental performance".

Victorian Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings is a supporter of the rating scheme. "Infrastructure projects can have substantial environment impacts, so reducing these impacts associated with their design, construction and operation is important," he says.

"An infrastructure rating tool can provide a useful means by which such impacts can be assessed and reduced."

"We are working in partnership with the Green Infrastructure Council to consider how such a tool could be developed and [used] in Victoria and would welcome continued dialogue. We applaud the initiative as an example of the private infrastructure sector taking steps to minimise its environmental impact."