# Residential Landscape Irrigation in Australia

- *What impact has water restrictions or total sprinkler bans had on irrigation companies in Australia.*
- *What opportunities have presented in tough times or has it all been doom and gloom.*
- *How has this impacted on the end user, has it changed their habits and understanding of irrigations systems and gardening.*
- *What do we need in the future*

# Real case scenario – Perth WA

- The Water Corporation provides potable water to 1.9 million people covering 2.5 million square km's (largest area covered by one water provider in the world)
- Rainfall and run off into the dams was decreasing each year
- Perth had very good ground water reserves though the infastructure was heavily reliant on dam water
- Back in 2001 drastic consumption cut backs were needed as dams were reaching all time lows and a hot summer was forecast
- Easy solution – no lawn and garden watering !

# Total sprinkler bans

- Threat of total sprinkler bans in Perth Western Australia – 2001
- The word “Total Sprinkler bans” was gaining momentum in government circles
- Water was the most talked about about topical item – news worthy
- Farmers had endured drought, rainfall and floods
- The big city urban water user – “what I cant water my lawns and gardens”
- “We want green lawns and lush gardens”
- “We want parks and gardens & sports fields”
- “We admire the outdoors” .....

# Industry working together

- IAA (Irrigation Association of Australia) now the IAL became a united front with Landscape Association, Turf Growers Association, Golf Course Supers Association, Green Keepers Association plus many more associations – **13,200 employees**
- Worked closely with the Water Corporation and State Government to avoid a total sprinkler ban
- Outcome - 2 day a week watering for lawns and gardens

# Water Wise, Water Wise ……..

- what does water wise mean, what has to be water wise – the plant, lawn, garden, sprinkler ???
- What has to be water wise – every thing
- Save water v traditional use
- People were previously told to be water wise though the end user did very little about it – “why change when I don’t have too”

# The end users 1st summer with "restrictions"

- Sales dropped 20% plus in residential irrigation.
- My garden cannot survive on 2 days a week
- Why water when everything will die
- We need to water 3, 4, 5 times a week – why not every day

# Water Consumption is still high

*How do I beat the system*

- Increased watering times
- Watering morning and night
- Watering on additional days not allocated

# How long to water for ?

- Industry and the Water Corporation meet to discuss very simple sprinkler run time schedules – 10mm watering. Marketing campaign around **15 minutes** (previously the campaign was 10mm which confused people)
- Everyone was encouraged to apply soil wetting agents on lawns and gardens, mulch in garden beds, lightly fertilise and get to know your irrigation system.
- Adjusting irrigation controllers - Were is my automatic controller, how do I program it, how does it actually work, there was a prior set & forget mentality

# Year 2 with restrictions

- Change of attitude, habit and practise amongst the irrigation industry and allied industries
- Industry worked closely with the Water Corporation to make water wise real and meaningful - *training, talks, presentations*
- Combination of factors all fall into the water wise pool – *correct soil blend, water wise plants, hardy turf, quality irrigation, irrigation scheduling, mulching gardens, wetting agents, proper maintenance*
- “Heh Lawns and gardens can survive on 2 days a week”

# Consumer changes

- The public and trades people wanted a reliable irrigation system that was going to water without failure on the assigned 2 water days each week
- Increased sales in better quality irrigation product – controllers, sprinklers, valves and the list goes on
- The consumer focus was off cheap unreliable products and onto quality plus they needed and asked for “advice’

# Restrictions - Impact on business

- Very positive impact as the public and trade wanted a quality irrigation system & expert advice.
- Retail staff needed to be re trained in areas we took for granted – DIY design, calculating precipitation rates & scheduling
- The up selling process became easier
- The sales on cheap controllers, sprinklers and associated equipment plummeted.

# Automatic Controllers

- End users want a good quality reliability controller at an affordable price.
- They do not want something that is cheap and potentially unreliable. It must come on when required otherwise the watering day or period is lost.
- The controller does not need to be over complicated; in fact less is most probably better.
- End users want, large clear display screens and easy to program controllers which are not too complicated.

# Turf Watering

- The low precipitation output and high uniformity rotary type nozzle domestic sprinklers have become very popular for all the right reasons. They do save water when compared to traditional nozzles when designed & installed correctly plus programmed for the correct run time. The MP Rotator and the Rain Bird Rotary nozzles are truly the leaders in domestic turf watering. More manufacturers to follow suit in time on these type sprinklers
- Retailers, trade and the public would all benefit by stocking, selling and installing adjustable arc nozzles as apposed to fixed arc models. Less inventory and more flexibility is definitely a high priority.

# Garden Watering

- Shrub sprays and misting micro sprays will be in the irrigation museum sooner than later if not already.
- Inline drip and a mixture of well placed bubblers, drippers and emitters are rapidly replacing and over taking traditional spray method.
- More education and training is required so the correct drip product is placed beside or near the correct plant. Whilst it is proven that drip watering does save water v sprays its “extremely important to get the scheduling spot on.
- In the event the scheduling is not correct and the product selection is wrong then we are back to square 1 and wasting water.
- Drip systems require far more maintenance and care if they are going to work well. The challenge for manufacturers over time is to make the entire drip process easier for consumers so they become confident with the whole concept.

# Sensors – soil moisture & rain

- Sensors should be made mandatory for every automatic irrigation system thru ought Australia.
- Price point needs to be under $100
- Wireless type products will run supreme over a hard wired product due to the labour saving and the ease of installation. The product needs to have visual lights or some form of identifying when the irrigation is enabled or disabled.

# What can product manufacturers do to help irrigation companies in Australia

- Continue to develop  and manufacture water efficient products – less water v traditional use.
- Training to resellers and the irrigators on what the water efficient product is about and demonstrate how it saves water.
- Joint promotions with re sellers to get the message into the market place

# Working together

- Each state and region in Australia needs to have a strong, sound and respected voice representing irrigation who communicates and works with government and water providers
- Irrigation committees (IAL) need to also form alliances with allied industries – turf growers, landscapers, golf course supers, nursery ect
- A united group / voice can work with government, regulators and water providers to implement best watering practices.
- Best practice that has worked in one state or region should be shared with other states and regions – example of this is the Water Wise Garden Irrigator Program in Western Australia.
- Governments need to take the bold step and enforce standards on all new irrigation systems. Make best practice or standards mandatory rather than a feel good option.

# What impact will water-efficient product/service certification programs make

- Water providers and the government are now using some certified programs for product guidance and looking at these programs to identify true water saving products. An example of this is the Smart Approved Watermark program.
- Certified irrigation designers, installers and industry people are vital for the future.
- Certification can lead onto licensing and formal regulation.

# Conclusion

- Perth lawns and gardens can survive on 2 day a week watering
- Key industry stakeholders working closely with the Water Corporation and Government have been key drivers for the success.
- Irrigation and Landscape practises, habits and attitudes have changed for ever.
- Most importantly the water savings have been significant plus lawns and gardens are still a big part of our lives and strong irrigation businesses will continue to grow.

# Thank You