**Embargoed: 4am, 6 February 2024**

*Please contact* *Cathy Reade* *0413 575 934 to arrange interviews.*

*All media materials will be posted* [*here*](https://www.aares.org.au/AARES2024) *or available on request.*

*Media are welcome to attend – please contact Cathy to register.*

*The short program is available*[*here*](https://www.aares.org.au/Events/AARES-2024/program/) *and the detailed conference program*[*here*](https://virtual.oxfordabstracts.com/#/event/4802/program)*.*

*The abstract book is* [*here.*](http://www.aares.org.au/files/aares_conference_2024/Abstract_book_2024_01_31.pdf)

**AUSTRALIANS ARE WILLING TO PAY FOR SAFE, CLEAN DRINKING WATER ACCESS FOR ALL**

Despite being a rich, developed country, hundreds of thousands of Australians in small and remote communities lack access to safe, clean drinking water. A study by researchers from the Australian National University (ANU) has found that Australian households, both urban and rural, are willing to pay to ensure good drinking water for every Australian.

This is the central message to be presented by Professor Quentin Grafton from the Crawford School of Public Policy at the ANU in his address to the Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) Conference, being held from 6-9 February in Canberra. AARES is the pre-eminent society promoting research relevant to Australasia in agricultural, environmental, food, and resource economics and agribusiness. The conference theme is *Grand Challenges at the Frontier of Applied Economics.*

“Consistent supply of good quality drinking water in remote areas can be very costly, with water users and utilities often unable to bear the costs. Given these costs and the relatively small number of people affected, universal good quality drinking water in Australia has been typically regarded as a low priority for policymakers,” said Professor Grafton, who is an Australian Laureate Fellow & Chairholder, UNESCO Chair in Water Economics and Convener of the Water Justice Hub.

The ANU study sought to understand the level of public support for a program targeting universal access to 'good quality' drinking water across Australia.

“A survey of over 3,500 participants, eliciting votes for a water quality improvement program to be financed through an annual household tax, for 10 years found clear public support for the proposed program, with willingness-to-pay (WTP) in excess of $200 per household per year, for our most conservative model,” said Prof Grafton.

The researchers believe Australia is lagging behind sustainable development goals to achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for the whole population.

“Our study should give all Australian governments the confidence to finally deliver sustainable and ‘fit-for-purpose’ improvements in rural and remote communities to achieve good quality drinking water for all Australians,” Professor Grafton concluded.

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