

Submission by the Australasian Chapter of the International Erosion Control Association (IECA).
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IECA is a not-for-profit member organisation for individuals and organisations who share the responsibility for managing erosion and its by-product, sediment.

Submission:

Stormwater quality management is presently focused too heavily on high-maintenance water quality improvement devices such as gross pollutant traps, wetlands, bioretention and sand filters.

All of these devices are important but they are only effective for the operational phase of urban development – i.e. once the development is completed and is being “lived in”.

Numerous studies around Australia (and, indeed, worldwide) have shown that the largest contribution to pollution in stormwater comes from construction sites. In terms of sediment and particulate pollution, construction sites produce 50 to 200 times the amount compared to operational (i.e. completed) urban areas per unit area.

Excess sediment from construction-phase erosion contains significant quantities of nutrients, metals and contaminants. As such, it leads to ecological damage through sediment smothering and excess nutrient loading, potential flooding problems due to choking of stormwater assets, additional maintenance costs for navigation (increased dredging, for example) and reduced amenity for water users.

Managing stormwater quality during construction is cheaper (per kg of pollution) than during the operational phase of development and has far greater potential for large-scale catchment benefits. It also makes sense because it recognises and targets the most significant polluter of stormwater (the construction phase).

Funding and resources regarding stormwater must be funnelled into programs, guidelines and enforcement relating to construction-phase erosion and sediment problems. National guidelines already exist, published by the Australasian Chapter of the International Erosion Control Association (IECA) in 2008. Unfortunately, these guidelines have not been wholly adopted by all states and territories. In addition, these guidelines require funding and resources to update them to reflect latest technologies and the current legislative environment.

In addition, funding must be made available to Local and State Government to have erosion and sediment control officers in their environment team. The lack of enforcement by government of environmental laws is costing our waterways and is not in line with community expectations.

Summary of our recommendations for improved stormwater management:

- Funding a national standard for construction-phase erosion and sediment control that dictates expected outcomes (in terms of water quality) and provides an industry document to help achieve those outcomes; and
- Funding better enforcement of environmental laws through Local and State government agencies to meet community and industry expectations.