

Listen to this extract from a radio interview with an environmental scientist, adviser on water projects.

Optional exercise Read these statements and decide whether they are True or False.

1. There are two approaches to water management based on supply and demand.
 2. The solutions for each type are very different.
 3. Scientists are looking for new ways to exploit groundwater.
 4. At desalination plants water is cleaned up for domestic use.
 5. Icebergs are being towed to islands where they are melted. (Answers below)
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RH: radio host; AC: guest, Alan Clark

RH: So Mr Clark, we've heard lots of worrying details about water shortage around the world and you've explained a little bit about some particular case studies. Maybe we could end on a more optimistic note and you could tell us a bit about what *can* be done to ease this problem? What *is* being done?

AC: Yes, of course. I should start off by explaining that there are two basic approaches to water management. The first is based on managing the supplies that already exist – we call this supply management and the second is related to demand management. Sometimes solutions overlap but this distinction is a useful starting point.

RH: So, could you give us some examples of each one?

AC: Yes. Let's start off with supply management. Sometimes the problem isn't that there is no water - it's actually that the existing water is mismanaged, wasted or just lost. So projects are set up to capture surface water - and to store it for later use. Groundwater also falls into this category. We are continually looking for new ways to exploit and extract groundwater.

RH: And what about the possibility of using sea water?

AC: A good point. There are desalination plants around the world where they transform sea water and make it suitable for agriculture. Also, there are lots of new water-sharing agreements being drawn up between neighbouring countries. Because in lots of cases the water is there - but the people just don't have access to it.

AC: And finally there's pollution of course. A lot of cases that we deal with are cases of polluted water that can be used if it is cleaned up effectively.

RH: And could you tell us a little bit about demand management?

AC: Yes. That's a much more complicated issue because we have to deal with all sorts of factors that influence the measures we eventually take.

RH: What kind of factors are we talking about here?

AC: Well each country has its own unique options depending on its levels of development, its hydrological situation of course, political and social influences, financial resources and many other factors.

RH: Yes, I understand - but when you've managed to cut through the red tape and you've got the necessary funds, what sorts of things can you do in a place which doesn't actually have any water?

AC: Well there are conventional solutions such as irrigation projects, water recycling plants and – in some cases – mobile water tanks. Then there are other quite ingenious but unconventional ideas such as towing icebergs and melting them near water consumers!

RH: Really?

AC: Yes. It sounds crazy but it's already starting to happen. In some cases water is being regularly towed by sea tankers, for example to islands without water resources.

RH: So – it seems as though – at the end of the day – the solutions are out there. It's just a case of finding the money to put them into practice?

AC: Exactly!

Answers 1 T, 2 F, 3 T, 4 F, 5 F

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