

Green+Blue

Parallels from Down Under

Kim A. Stephens, M.Eng., P.Eng. Executive Director,
Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC

In 2001, Kim Stephens was keynote speaker for a conference and training workshop organized by a coalition of local governments in New South Wales, Australia. It was a seminal moment for cross-pollinating Australian and British Columbia (BC) experience, and for relationship-building. At that 2001 event, Kim Stephens remarked on our parallel worlds and how they revolve around a shared vision for Water Balance management.

Fast forward to August 2016. His keynote presentation at Stormwater 2016, a national conference held in Queensland, Australia, provided a platform for reflecting on our parallel journeys during the period 2001 through 2016, and for looking ahead. He explained how BC is responding to a changing climate, and he compared Australia's "top-down" type of governance with BC's "top-down & bottom-up" approach to implementing changes in water and asset management practices.

Towards a Water-Resilient Future

Green+Blue. How well are we doing in BC, really? Time and distance provide perspective. Two keynote presentations in Australia over a 15-year period allowed me to view our BC situation in a comparative context. BC and Australia are on parallel journeys, but our pathways to a **water-resilient future** differ. Still, by sharing and comparing, we can inspire each other. Also, we can learn from each other's experience to avoid going down dead-ends.

In 2001, the challenge on both sides of the Pacific was HOW to overcome fear and doubt. Conventional wisdom at the time questioned whether Green+Blue approaches would work. Trans-Pacific sharing and learning helped to overcome fear and doubt. In 2016, the spotlight is on GETTING IT RIGHT.

Judge progress by the distance travelled, not the distance remaining. Although BC is progressing, communities must continually strive to do better by implementing Green+Blue practices that would achieve a water-resilient future, over time. BC experience over the past 15 years

demonstrates that "designing with nature" does make a difference.

To prepare for my 2016 keynote, I interviewed a cross-section of "water thought leaders" from across Australia. These conversations helped me identify over-arching themes that then shaped my storyline and its

relevance to an Australian audience. When I reflected on the differences in our approaches, it reinforced my appreciation for the transformational potential of our "top-down & bottom-up" approach.

Bringing about change in practices ultimately depends on alignment between decision-makers in local government and community champions. As BC case study experience shows, such an alignment can be a powerful combination. Once everyone agrees on expectations and how all the players will work together, each community can reach its goals in its own way.

Towards Sustainable Watershed Systems

In my 2016 keynote, I introduced Australians to three "big ideas" that underpin where we are heading in BC, namely: **Primacy of Hydrology**, **Shifting Baseline Syndrome**, and **Cathedral Thinking**. The three are interconnected. The outcome would be Sustainable Watershed Systems. ▶

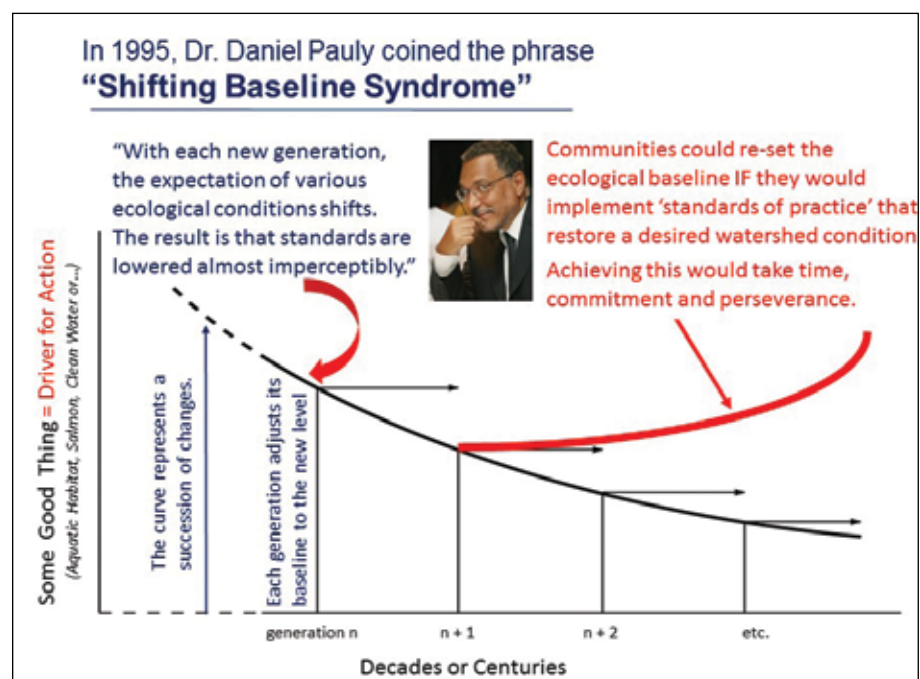


Figure 1: Shifting Baseline Syndrome illustrated. Graphic credit: Kim Stephens

'Convening for Action' experience shows that success will follow when local governments...

- Choose to be enabled
- Establish high expectation
- Embrace a shared vision
- Collaborate as a 'regional team'
- Align and integrate efforts
- Celebrate innovation
- Connect with community advocates
- Develop local government talent
- **Promote shared responsibility!**
- Change the land ethic for the better

- Changes in hydrology, not water quality, must be the primary focus of Green+Blue practices. If we get the hydrology right, water quality typically takes care of itself, especially in a residential development.
- Coined by University of British Columbia's Dr. Daniel Pauly, the Shifting Baseline Syndrome describes an incremental and imperceptible eroding of expectations and standards that results from each new generation lacking knowledge of the historical condition of the environment (Figure 1).
- The good news is that redevelopment creates an opportunity. If we can get the hydrology right the second time, and restore the water balance, we can then reset the ecological baseline.
- Achieving this outcome would take time, intergenerational commitment, and perseverance. This is the essence of "cathedral thinking" which describes our BC vision for Sustainable Watershed Systems.

In embarking on the journey to a water-resilient future, we can learn from our ancestors. The foundation for cathedral thinking is a far-reaching vision, a well thought-out blueprint, and long-term implementation.

These ideas resonated with the audience in Australia and opened eyes and minds to a different way of thinking.

Rod Wiese, a member of the Stormwater Australia Board provided this perspective in his conference presentation: "It is evident that Australian 'best practise' (which is founded on water quality metrics) falls dramatically short of effective waterway protection. Clearly, we need to manage volume and restore water balance pathways as Kim Stephens explained in his keynote about the **primacy of hydrology.**" This seems a promising sign that both experience and inspiration have once again been shared. sl

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