



# Like water for chocolate

**W**e don't give them enough credit, those men beyond the S-bend. Anyone who has to wrestle with a dud effluent pond envies their anaerobic expertise. Anyone raddled by cholera, typhoid or dysentery hankers for their sanitation skills. And anyone on a septic system dreads anything going wrong in the dunny department.

Yep, we don't praise the dudes who rule the doo-dooos enough. Besides, they protect us from the helminths (not breath-fresheners – they're nasty, sewerage-borne intestinal worms, and a really handy word to use in Scrabble).

In the chat-up league table, however, wastewater engineers suffer a distinct disadvantage. What gal would happily yield to the embrace of an effluent expert without first wanting to inspect under his fingernails?\*

It's a shame, really. Water is wasted on us. Don't believe me? Try going without it for a while.

Trouble is, we take the water supply for granted. I remember a public meeting at which a sea-change retiree was lamenting the quality of the local water supply. "Too much chlorine," he drawled loftily. "Like drinking a swimming pool."

"Listen up," I fired back. "If you were some Pakistani peasant farmer, you'd be bloody thankful that your water tasted like that because then you'd know it wasn't going to kill you. Besides, it's not just chlorinated: it's chloraminated." (Another impressive water-industry term.)

Water is like those other great fundamentals of life: soil, food, air and single malt. We need them and we use them,

but somehow feel guilty when we do. We suspect someone out there is over-indulging and people have to be punished. It's water self-torture, I suppose.

The doomsayers warn that all the water that's ever going to be available has already been created. I say porcine rectum. Give an 11-year-old Chinese superkid a chemical formula and they'll create a freshwater lake faster than you can say "Sino-centric domination of global equity markets".

Trying to make sense of it all, I decide to replace the word 'water' with the word 'chocolate' to make things a little less turbid (another excellent water-industry word).

I open the local paper: 'Future supplies of chocolate are guaranteed due to a new chocolate plant opening next year'... 'Government subsidies to help install chocolate tanks in more households...'. This is starting to sound hopeful.

I open one of the national papers: 'High-level discussions on the future allocation of chocolate in the Murray-Darling Basin'... 'Seriously heavy investment into the science of recycling chocolate for human consumption or for livestock'... Things are looking even better.

Maybe should loosen up a little about this water thing and just go with the flow.

We should go back at the bar and find that lonely wastewater engineer. He's that sad-looking coot who reckons his chances of horizontal conga are destined for the comminator (look it up). Cheer him up. Challenge him to a game of Scrabble. He's bound to win. ♣

\* *Admitting to a career as a tax inspector becomes a viable alternative.*



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