

Forget the dry, water it all



NOT smart, just logical ... developer Mac Stirling, above, and a grey water garden tap, right.



IMAGINE if we could reduce our reliance on dam water by 40 per cent.

"I know a way we can," says architect cum developer, Mac Stirling.

"It's not rocket science. Rural Australia has been doing it for 150 years."

Stirling has designed and built an eco-friendly home in the picturesque hamlet of Highfields in the Crows Nest Shire, just north of Toowoomba.

The architect who won acclaim transforming Lang Park into Suncorp Stadium says he will build six of the homes to kickstart in a 28ha subdivision given a green tick by the council.

Treechangers lured to Highfields village by lush bushland and views reminiscent of the Blue Mountains have discovered an oasis where they can still water their lawns and gardens — despite level 5 water restrictions.

"We wanted to recycle grey water," he said.

"Crows Nest council said, 'We'll go one better than that; we'll supply you with recycled waste water to class A standard for flushing toilets and for watering the garden.'"

The water is officially classified as non-drinkable, although water engineers told me the quality is better than much of the drinking water drawn from some creeks.

Crows Nest council recycles waste water and returns it to homes at Highfields via purple pipes. Similar schemes have begun in Hervey Bay and Pimpama. Stirling admits that at \$460,000 his four-bedroom homes cost about 10 per cent more than similar homes in the suburbs.

But he believes homeowners will more than get their money back in water and energy savings.

Each home has a 22,750-litre rainwater tank and another 3000-litre tank for the recycled water.

It also sports a solar hot water system, several water-saving devices such as triple A shower roses and has been built using many recycled products including bamboo. "Additional insulation reduces the need for airconditioning and that's another saving," Stirling said.

Farmers have been harvesting rainwater and filtering grey water for years, he said.

A solution before chaos reigns

WHAT if it doesn't rain and the water grid isn't completed on time?

Will councils be forced to stop approving building applications if they are unable to guarantee reliable water connections?

It's a question that disturbs gutsy Toowoomba Mayor Di Thorley, the first civic leader to take the water crisis seriously.

"If we were to stop connections,

Toowoomba would die," Cr Thorley said.

"Real estate would collapse. Builders would leave. Tradespeople would leave. There would be social collapse.

"We will be doing our best to make sure it doesn't happen."

Cr Thorley said two years ago recycling was inevitable and she was right.

PS...

MAYORS of southeast Queensland cities expect new desalination plants to be approved for Brisbane Island and Kawana on the Sunshine Coast. At the same time, there's speculation the output of the Tugun desal plant could be doubled.