

Water accounting and transparency

The sheet the rest of this series stands on: what proponents should publish and why secrecy fails everyone

The key idea: published numbers turn stand-offs into decisions

Most water conflict around new facilities isn't really about water. It's about **not knowing**. A community told "water use is commercial-in-confidence" is being asked to trade a real, shared resource for a secret. Published water accounting converts an unwinnable argument about trust into an assessable question about numbers. That's why transparency is this series' central demand.

What a real water account contains

Five things, none of them trade secrets: **annual volume by source** (potable, recycled, groundwater); **peak-day demand** in extreme heat; **WUE** alongside PUE (sheet 03); **discharge**, meaning what returns, where, at what quality and temperature; and **dry-year contingency**, meaning what changes when allocations tighten. Major global operators already publish site-level water data; "can't disclose" is a choice, not a necessity.

Making it stick

Promises made in glossy consultation documents evaporate; **conditions of approval** don't. The transparency ask belongs in the planning process: annual public reporting of actual (not just predicted) water use, as an enforceable condition. It costs a genuine operator almost nothing (they meter everything anyway) and it protects them too: published numbers are the only durable answer to rumour.

The two-way street

Scrutiny cuts both directions. "Zero water" marketing deserves the same audit as high use; it usually means an electricity trade-off. A facility whose published numbers show modest, recycled-sourced use deserves to have that acknowledged. With numbers, communities can distinguish good actors from bad, which vague anxiety never can.

What good practice looks like

- Annual water use by source published, as an approval condition, not a courtesy.
- Peak-day and dry-year figures included, not just annual averages.
- Discharge quality and temperature reported where water returns to the system.
- One plain-language water page per facility, updated yearly, findable by any resident.

Questions to ask

Will actual annual water use, by source, be published and is that a condition of approval? What is the dry-year plan and who verifies it? If numbers can't be shared, precisely what and why and who checked that claim?

Want to know more? The one-line test for any proposal: "What is your annual water use, by source, in a dry year — and where is that published?" This sheet is general information, not legal or planning advice; a specific proposal is confirmed by qualified assessment.