



NAME: DATE:



ROLE PLAY: STOUSH BREWING OVER BOTTLED WATER - STUDENT ACTIVITY

YOU WILL NEED:



1. Work in groups of 4 to 6 read the transcript below. Everyone has a different 'role' to play.

2. **Roles:**

KERRY O'BRIEN – 7.30 Report

JONATHAN HARLEY – 7.30 Report

ALEC WAGSTAFF - CORPORATE AFFAIRS, COCA-COLA AMATIL

MARGARET PONTIFEX - MANGROVE MOUNTAIN DISTRICTS COMMUNITY GROUP

DR NOEL MERRICK – NATIONAL CENTRE FOR GROUND WATER MANAGEMENT

MALCOLM BROOKS - MAYOR, GOSFORD CITY COUNCIL

Discuss the different issues raised; continue role-play into debate with each stakeholder represented and their position argued for.

What does this example say about the ownership of water?

What level of management should government hold in monitoring industries?

TV Program Transcript:

Stoush Brewing over Spring Water

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

LOCATION: <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2005/s1463816.htm>

Broadcast: 19/09/2005

Reporter: Jonathan Harley

3. **KERRY O'BRIEN:** It doesn't seem that long ago that water was something we just drank without question out of a tap or a bubbler. Then came the age of fluoride, followed not long after by the surge in popularity of bottled water. In less than a generation, bottled water has become a \$600 million-a-year industry, and it seems Australians are happy to pay a premium for a bottled drop. But what do the bottlers pay for the water in the first place? In the case of one operation owned and run by beverage giant Coca-Cola Amatil, the answer to that question is not very much at all. And as Jonathan Harley reports, a small community is trying to stop the company from taking any more spring water.

JONATHAN HARLEY: At first glance, the Somersby Plateau north of Sydney appears to have escaped the drought ravaging much of Australia. But there's been no decent rain here for 12 years. The fruit groves and chicken farms are sustained by a vast underground spring. Now, that water is at the centre of a tug of war between this local community and a company making millions out of the national thirst for bottled spring water.

ALEC WAGSTAFF, CORPORATE AFFAIRS, COCA-COLA AMATIL: The bottled water industry in Australia is worth around \$600 million a year, and it's growing at around 10 per cent.

JONATHAN HARLEY: That's a lot of water and a lot of growth?

ALEC WAGSTAFF: It's pretty solid growth.

MARGARET PONTIFEX, MANGROVE MOUNTAIN DISTRICTS COMMUNITY GROUP: I still don't think we can afford to be putting water in bottles – not water out of the ground..

JONATHAN HARLEY: The underground reservoir known as an aquifer runs below the Somersby Plateau and its landmark, Mangrove Mountain. In many parts, water can be found close to the surface. Some ground water feeds directly into rivers and creeks but most of it trickles deep underground, among layers of sediment and rock. This water is tapped by sinking bores to supply homes and farms or, more recently, for bottling.



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ALEC WAGSTAFF: To give you an idea, we produce something like around 20 million one-litre bottles from this source each year.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Coca-Cola Amatil already has a licence to extract 25 million litres a year from its Peats Ridge Springs plant. Now the company wants to almost triple its take to 66 million litres a year, sold under its own brand and some generic labels. While it's not the only commercial water bottler in the area, this local outpost of a global beverage giant has become a lightning rod for community anger.

MARGARET PONTIFEX: They can afford to buy it, but we can't afford to let them have it. It's as simple as that.

JONATHAN HARLEY: What does this bush mean to you?

MARGARET PONTIFEX: Well, it's me life. I hate to see it dying out. I think it's something that belongs to all Australians.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Margaret Pontifex has lived on the Somersby Plateau all her life. Her ancestors settled on Mangrove Mountain in the 19th century. For more than 80 years, her family has had a licence to pick wildflowers, but these days, there are few flowers left to collect.

MARGARET PONTIFEX: They used to be all along here but they've just died out.

JONATHAN HARLEY: And why have they died?

MARGARET PONTIFEX: Water table's dropped – simple as that.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Three studies are being conducted into the sustainable use of the aquifer. They'll be finished next year. But hydrologist Noel Merrick, who's heading the key study, says bottling more water at Peats Ridge Springs will have negligible environmental impact on Mangrove Mountain or other parts of the plateau.

DR NOEL MERRICK, NATIONAL CENTRE FOR GROUND WATER MANAGEMENT: The sorts of volumes we're talking about are really very small. No, the mountain's not drying up. There's 300m of ground water beneath their feet.

JONATHAN HARLEY: The Pontifex family have one bore on their property and they use it just for emergencies. It's good clean water. It's basically the same stuff that Coca-Cola Amatil is tapping and bottling just over the way. There are hundreds of bores similar to this one all over this region. The question is who actually owns this water and what's a fair price to pay for it?

MARGARET PONTIFEX: Every Australian. Every Australian. That's what I think. And I don't think any one of us has a right to take it away and sell it.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Who owns this ground water?

ALEC WAGSTAFF: Groundwater is associated with the land rights.

JONATHAN HARLEY: If Coca-Cola Amatil is allowed to nearly triple operations here, it would sell the water to retailers for around \$18 million. But the initial cost of that water, the annual licence fee, would be less than \$200. It's a subject the company's spokesman, Alec Wagstaff, appears reluctant to discuss.

ALEC WAGSTAFF: I think it varies by individual licence. Each bore has a licence. It's a nominal fee.

JONATHAN HARLEY: The figure that we've been quoted is about \$181. Does that sound right?

ALEC WAGSTAFF: I don't know. It would depend on the specific licence but it's of that order of magnitude and that's exactly the same fee that all users in this area would pay for their licence.

JONATHAN HARLEY: In much of rural Australia, new water trading regimes put a financial premium on a resource once taken for granted. For crops like cotton, trading has sent the cost of irrigating water as high as \$2,000 per million litres. By stark contrast, water on the Somersby Plateau costs less than 3c per million litres, and that's for water good enough to bottle.



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DR NOEL MERRICK: It's very cheap. In anyone's language, that's very cheap.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Noel Merrick says cost comparisons are complicated, but wants the Somersby Plateau water given greater value.

DR NOEL MERRICK: The ground water is essentially free. Having access to a big ground water entitlement is a good business to be in.

ALEC WAGSTAFF: The water's not free. There is a substantial investment in the land itself, so just like any farmer who has to buy a property, the price of that property is related to the water rights that attach to it. So when we bought this business, we paid the previous owner a fair price based on the water rights attaching to it.

JONATHAN HARLEY: But there's more than just money at stake, and what happens on the plateau flows beyond this immediate community.

MALCOLM BROOKS, MAYOR, GOSFORD CITY COUNCIL: My concern is – our first priority is to make sure we have enough water for the citizens that live here and the citizens that are going to come and live here, not just Gosford, for the whole of the Central Coast.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Between the plateau and the coast, the city of Gosford is spilling out, powered by families fleeing Sydney's sky-high housing prices. Gosford's small-town infrastructure is groaning under the pressure, not least the city's main source of water.

MALCOLM BROOKS: We're concerned, especially the amount of ground water that has been taken out of the Mangrove Mountain plateau, because that ground water flows into our catchment areas, flows into our river and streams.

JONATHAN HARLEY: You only need to look at Mangrove Creek Dam to understand the full extent of Gosford's water worries. Here, levels are at less than 22% of capacity, so the council is in no mood to give any water away, whether it's above the ground or below it. Some ground water feeds directly into the rivers and streams. And the three studies to be finished next year will clarify how all the plateau's ground water bores are affecting the waterways which supply Gosford. So at the very least, Gosford Council wants Coca-Cola Amatil to hold off its expansion plans till those studies are complete.

MALCOLM BROOKS: We're asking Coca-Cola to please wait. They're a multinational company. Surely another six months is not going to affect them greatly, by waiting until we know the results of the study.

JONATHAN HARLEY: But the company won't wait and it's taken Gosford Council to the State Land and Environment Court. Hearings resume later this month.

ALEC WAGSTAFF: If we had any doubts about the sustainability of this aquifer, we would suspend operations.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Among Gosford Council's more extreme proposals are its own desalination plant or, more cheaply and more likely, directly tapping the ground water to supply the city, and that could involve volumes many times what the bottlers are drawing. For Margaret Pontifex, it's not a very rosy outlook for her wildflowers, regardless of the price people pay for the ground water.

MARGARET PONTIFEX: To me, money is not the issue. It's much bigger than money. It's our water, Australia's water, that we don't have enough of.

KERRY O'BRIEN: Jonathan Harley with that report.

