Historically, flood mitigation was considered in isolation from other water issues. Today, climate change, urbanisation and environmental degradation have enabled us to realise an integrated approach to water management is paramount.

This is epitomised in the idea of a water sensitive city, a concept that originated through the National Water Initiative and is now embraced nationally including at Fairfield City. Although no one place in the world can claim to be a ‘Water Sensitive City’, many have committed to this journey. This can only be achieved by integrating our natural creek systems and water cycle with the built environment and by engaging with our communities. It is a journey to becoming a sustainable city, ensuring future generations are not deprived of the benefits we enjoy today.

During April 2009, I visited Europe on a ‘Water Sensitive Cities’ study tour. The tour was organised by Melbourne Water and partially sponsored by the FMA and Fairfield City Council. We observed innovative water management projects that integrated issues such as energy and transport with the built environment, consulted the community and embraced the cultural context. We engaged in dialogue with experts who strived to implement targets in the EU Water Framework Directive. The projects ranged from rain gardens and roof top detention to the integration of rivers with historic floodplains.

This paper documents these inspiring projects and discusses the drivers and barriers to implementing such initiatives and the key themes that emerged. The paper will conclude with ideas that might be applied in Australia.