

BOOK REVIEW

Clean, Green and Blue – Singapore’s Journey Towards Environmental and Water Sustainability

*By Tan Yong Soon with
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This newly published book by Tan Yong Soon, who is the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, is a collaborative effort of Tan Yong Soon and members of the ministry and the PUB. It is an important and authoritative book on Singapore’s journey towards “environmental and water sustainability”. It not only deals with the history and the present, it also takes a look at the future.

The book, in 5 parts, is written in a non-technical language that is easy to understand. The five parts cover:

- i) Drawing Lessons from Singapore’s Environmental Journey
- ii) Achieving a Clean Environment
- iii) Closing the Water Gap
- iv) Applying Economics and Working with the Community
- v) Looking Ahead to Future Challenges

The events described in this book are in the living memories of older Singaporeans, those who are in their fifties or older. For the reviewer, it brought back memories of his younger days when he worked for Dr Ong Swee Law, PUB Chairman from August 1965 to December 1970, on the preliminary work for the Upper Seletar Reservoir. This reservoir was the biggest reservoir when it was built and is still the biggest until now. What the reviewer did not know then was that the project was most probably driven by the then Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew who has since written about his obsession with water supply security for the very survival of our country. While closing the “water gap” may be the most important achievement of the last 50 years for national security, it is right that Singapore’s achievement in cleaning up and greening the city should be recognized. These achievements are no less important in determining modern Singapore’s position in the world. Many older Singaporeans will remember the early Tree Planting Days. The trees we planted are now nearly 40 years old.

The book would be valuable if it recorded only our achievements in the environmental field. The value is much enhanced by revealing the thinking behind the policies and the lessons gleaned from the experience. When we look at the lessons, we will be struck by the similarities between what the authors think are the success factors and what we, EHS professionals, think are the secrets to good EHS performance at our work sites.

These are:

- i) Clear Vision
- ii) Long-term planning
- iii) Constant Innovation, and
- iv) Practical and Effective Approach

Our managers and leaders must have a clear vision of what they want to achieve in EHS, they must think long-term and not resort to the quick fix, they must have constancy of purpose and they must be practical. Sounds like a Quality approach and it is.

This book is highly recommended to general readers and EHS practitioners alike. For general Singaporean readers, the book will make them feel proud of our country’s achievements and also make them aware of the challenges still to come. For practitioners, the book will provide insights and inspiration for how to tackle seemingly impossible problems that they face in their work.

By Ngiam Tong Yuen