



**WATER MANAGERS' FORUM
THURSDAY 14 AUGUST 2008**

WATER MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE, BALLINA 2008

Panellists:

Stewart McLeod	Dubbo City Council
Carmel Krogh	Eurobodalla Shire Council
Mike Rayner	Tweed Shire Council
Adrian Langdon	Dept of Water and Energy
Chris Davis	Institute of Sustainable Futures
Mirko Sramek	Water Loss Management Program

For a sixth year, the Water Managers' Forum was held at the LGSA Water Management Conference. The Forum was organised by the Water Directorate and facilitated by the Executive Officer, Gary Mitchell.

The Water Managers' Forum aims to discuss topics pertinent to water managers in local government. Approximately 70 people attended the Forum comprised mainly of technical officers and staff from local government water utilities.

The opinions expressed at the Water Managers' Forum by individuals do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Water Directorate or the LGSA NSW. Wherever possible, publicly expressed opinions have been accurately transcribed or summarised.

Further feedback can be sent to the Water Directorate by email on info@waterdirectorate.asn.au or posted on the Water Directorate's Discussion Forum at: <http://www.waterdirectorate.asn.au/maillinglist/>

PANEL ONE: NON-CONNECTION TO TOWN WATER AND SEWER

Issues raised:

- Mike Rayner introduced this topic and provided a summary of two recent development applications in the Tweed Shire that propose being completely independent of council water and sewer.
- Attendees from other coastal councils agreed that there has been an increase in the number of non-connection development applications.
- In December 2006 the Water Directorate hosted a one day workshop with representatives from DWE which concluded that a reference tool should be established for councils to ensure that all the necessary regulations are met when approving a non-connection development application.
- The outcome of the workshop was that DEUS (now DWE) would prepare a matrix of legislation that governs DAs and demonstrates what the responsibility of councils is when town water is not connected.
- Adrian Langdon advised that DWE has created an internet based reference tool. The reference tool is currently being reviewed by the department's legal advisers and is due to be launched before the end of 2008.
- Adrian Langdon noted that the *Water Industry Competition Act* was enacted on Friday 8/8/08. This means that any organisation can now apply to become a water authority which will make it easier for developers to bypass purchasing water and sewer services from LWUs.
- Several comments from audience members pointed out that the NSW Government is sending mixed messages to the community: on the one hand the current LWU Inquiry is looking at increased economies of scale and on the other hand the Government is prepared to approve small privately owned water authorities under WICA.
- Panel concluded that the need for a clear set of rules and regulations is imperative and that the DWE reference tool needs to be available asap.

Recommendations and actions:

- Keep a watching brief on this topic and trial the DWE reference tool when it becomes available.
- Provide an update on *WICA* in the newsletter.

PANEL TWO: BUSINESS CONTINUITY GUIDELINES

- Carmel Krogh provided an update on this topic which was initially placed on the Water Directorate's list of high priorities in 2002 as a result of the security issues raised following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001.
- A show of hands at the Water Managers Forum in 2006 indicated that very few attendees had a disaster recovery or a risk management plan in the event of a major catastrophe.
- In 2007 MC2 Pacific was engaged to prepare the *Business Continuity Guidelines*. Carmel advised that the document is largely complete and that the subcommittee is currently reviewing the final draft prior to publication in October 2008.
- The *Business Continuity Guidelines* are designed to provide an integrated and consistent framework for LWUs in their approach to:
 - Risk assessment and management
 - Emergency response and crisis management; and
 - Business continuity plans
- In addition to the Guidelines a series of workshops is proposed to assist member councils with the implementation of these Guidelines.
- A survey form was distributed at the beginning of the Forum asking attendees to tick their preferred regional location – Sydney, Coffs Harbour, Queanbeyan or Dubbo.
- One of the attendees suggested that an on-line workshop could be the best way to deliver the training as it removes the need for travelling to and from the workshop by delegates.

Recommendations and actions:

- Eloise Stanley to collate the workshop survey forms and provide a summary to the Executive Committee meeting in September.
- Eloise Stanley to investigate on-line delivery options including GoTo Meeting.
- Coffs Harbour was the preferred regional location from the surveys collected.

PANEL THREE: NSW WATER REFORMS

Issues raised:

- Stewart McLeod introduced this topic and provided a summary of the institutional and regulatory reform in regional NSW Panel discussion in the morning session.
- During his keynote speech the Minister clearly indicated to councils that if they choose the status quo that they will no longer receive financial assistance from the State Government. The Minister reiterated this statement during the subsequent Panel discussion.
- Some attendees felt that the Minister was unfair in his criticisms of councils as small LWUs, particularly in remote areas, are not able to separate their economic role of providing cost efficient water and sewer services from their community obligations to the town.
- The work undertaken by Sam Samra at DWE and his encouragement of councils to meet the Best Practice Guidelines was acknowledged.
- Some delegates expressed disappointment that the lengthy consultation period has so far not yet produced a report.
- Carmel Krogh asked attendees to show their hand if their council has factored government funding into its 30 year financial plans. The majority of attendees indicated that they will not be reliant on government funding.
- General consensus that a large number of councils will be able to operate without government financial assistance and will be sustainable.
- A number of attendees expressed their scepticism of the whole water reform review particularly as the focus is on water supply. A couple of the attendees observed that little attention has been paid to sewerage services, possibly because it is not a “sexy” topic.

Recommendations and actions:

- The Water Directorate to continue to work with the LGSA to promote our “one size does not fit all” policy position.

PANEL FOUR: FOURTH GENERATION WATER SYSTEMS

Issues raised:

- Chris Davis presented a brief overview of the philosophy of fourth generation water systems which involves the integration planning, water, sewerage and stormwater functions in the one organisation.
- Chris highlighted the risks posed by just one or two consumers dying from drinking poor quality water. Should a death or serious health issue occur, public trust in the water authority and the whole water industry would be destroyed.
- Councils are well placed to intergrate land use planning and sensitive water design, with the delivery of safe drinking water.

Recommendations and actions:

- Encourage our members to implement the risk management guidelines in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines 2004.
- Carmel Krogh to follow up whether HACCAP should be addressed in the Business Continuity Guidelines.
- Attendees obtain a copy of the "Watershed Management for Drinking Water Quality" from the AWA Bookshop.

PANEL FIVE: WATER LOSS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Issues raised:

- Mirko Sramek, Program Manager, provided a presentation on the progress of the WLMP over the past 12 months: 21 councils at the investigation stage, 5 projects submitted for funding approval, 8 projects underway and 2 completed projects.
- So far, the WLMP has achieved committed water savings of 5.5 gigalitres per year. Water savings were initially lower than expected but are now starting to increase as more projects move to the implementation stage. It is on track to save 10 gigalitres of water each year by 2010.
- Mirko provided an overview of the water loss and detection project that is almost complete for Bega Valley Shire Council.

Recommendations and actions:

- Water Directorate to continue encouraging member councils to join the program and devote the necessary staff resources to implementing the water loss and detection strategies.