



**WATER MANAGERS' FORUM
THURSDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2009
WATER MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE, DENILIQVIN 2009**

Panellists:

Stewart McLeod	Dubbo City Council
Carmel Krogh	Shoalhave City Council
John Maxwell	Tumut Shire Council
Greg Searle	Eurobodalla Shire Council
Brendan Moran	Bureau of Meterology
Emma Pryor	MWH
George Freeman	DECC/ Office of Water

For a seventh 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 50 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: LOW PRESSURE SEWERAGE SYSTEMS

Issues raised:

- Greg Searle began the discussion with an overview of the issues his council is trying to understand as Eurobodalla Shire Council is concerned about the ongoing maintenance responsibilities and costs associated with the installation of low pressure sewerage.
- Issues raised by panel members and attendees included:
 - Whether councils are going to be responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the system and, if so, who will pay for the additional cost?
 - The reluctance of landowners to pay for the higher electricity costs of connecting to a low pressure sewerage system.
 - Determining the risk of overflows to the environment and how this will be cleaned up/paid for.
 - Who will pay if the residential plumbing system is not up to standard or the resident wants to move the position of the plumbing before connecting to this system?
 - What size block of land is optimal for this type of system?
 - Are there any odour issues that must be dealt with that are different to sewerage odour in general?
 - How do councils ensure that residents maintain the system – is it a regular inspection fee that is required?
- Carmel Krogh commented that in Shoalhaven the community had been split between a preference for gravity designed systems and pressure sewerage systems in backlog works for small villages
- Greg Searle advised that a copy of the Eurobodalla policy is available on their website at:
<http://www.eurocoast.nsw.gov.au/site/publications/strategies/policyreg/livepolicydocs/2228.pdf>
- There was general agreement that low pressure sewerage systems can be useful in backlog schemes
- Gary Mitchell advised that back in 2002 the members of the Water Directorate received a copy of a Low Pressure Sewerage Protocol developed by Cary Reynolds for Wagga Wagga City Council.
- An electronic copy of the Protocol is available for members that are interested.

Recommendations and actions:

- Executive Committee considers revisiting and updating the Low Pressure Sewerage Protocol that was developed by Wagga Wagga City Council in 2002.

PANEL TWO: COLLECTION OF BoM DATA

- Brendan Moran of the Bureau of Meteorology was invited to the Forum to provide background information about the data that BoM is collecting on water usage from councils across NSW.
- The Federal Government announced in April 2008 a \$12.9b 'Water for the Future' program. This investment \$450 million for the 'Improving Water Information Program'. See the BoM website for a full list of their responsibilities under the *Commonwealth Water Act 2007*: www.bom.gov.au/water.
- The role of BoM is to **collate** the data and not to **collect** it. The regulations outline the responsibilities of those authorities that are to supply data. See the website under regulations for this information.
- Approximately 30 councils (>10,000 connections) in NSW are required to provide data and the NSW Office of Water is the coordinator of the data.
- The data supplied is not quality controlled by BoM – they are relying on the accuracy of the councils that supply the data.
- A data transfer format (DTF) is being established to assist with the delivery of data to BoM but at this stage data will be accepted in any electronic format. The DTF is not expected to be ready for another 12 months.
- The benefits of national data collation include:
 - Flood warnings on a national and local scale
 - Dam level index for all states and individual dams
 - Better able to understand weather patterns and climate change
- BoM has \$30 million to spend over the next 2 years to assist councils to “get up to speed” with data collection requirements. Already \$50 million has been spent nationally on data collation.

Recommendations and actions:

- Keep a watching brief on this issue.

PANEL THREE: INTEGRATED WATER CYCLE MANAGEMENT

Issues raised:

- George Freeman, NSW Office of Water, and Emma Pryor, MWH, were invited to the Forum to discuss lessons learnt from the introduction of IWCMs.
- George Freeman outlined the advantages and disadvantages of the IWCM approach and reported that 75% of LWUs have completed or are currently committed to an IWCM.
- LWUs can request an extension to the Best Practice Guidelines deadline relating to the start of IWCM by writing to Colin McLean at the Office of Water. The ongoing water reform process can be quoted as the reason for not starting the IWCM process in the past 12 months.
- Advantages of IWCMs include:
 - Encourages a review of all the other 6 best practice criteria
 - Broadens water cycle planning processes
 - Encourages councils to focus on alternate water sources such as effluent and stormwater when they may seem too expensive at first
- Disadvantages of IWCMs include:
 - Data needs to be accurate and verified
 - Parameters of the study must be clear or it can be expanded too easily to try and too easily to answer all issues and problems for a council
 - Reports are generally too long and not easily digested.
- The Office of Water has a list of resources on its website that can be of assistance to LWUs that have not already started the process.
- Greg Mashiah inquired about the perception that the IWCM process is too narrow, focusing mainly on urban water and sewer strategic planning.
- George Freeman advised him to look at the fact sheets on the DWE website to determine where to direct other issues that come up in the course of completing an IWCM.
- Emma Pryor provided a short summary of the CENTROC project and how taking IWCM to the second level has been very useful for these councils as it has helped determine alternate water sources such as stormwater or recycling or groundwater.
- Secure yield is considered a major topic for all owners or managers of water supplies.

Recommendations and actions:

- Encourage all member councils to start and complete an IWCM in accordance with the Best Practice Guidelines.
- Write a newsletter item advising councils that they can request for an extension to the deadline for starting an IWCM due to the uncertainty generated by the water reform process.

PANEL FOUR: OPEN DISCUSSION

- Gary Mitchell invited the audience to ask or comment on any issues that they would like to be discussed.

Issues raised:

- Greg Mashiah raised the issue that HACCP incidents should be shared amongst LWUs to ensure that disasters and other incidents are not repeated.
 - Carmel Krogh advised that she has familiar with disasters in the workplace and that it would be good if “lessons learnt” could be shared in a forum amongst water industry staff. She also noted that the culture of WIOA provides a good example with operators sharing knowledge and expertise amongst themselves at conferences and other forums.
 - Stewart McLeod congratulated Sam Samra, DWE, for putting an analysis of boil water alerts in the latest Water Utilities Performance Monitoring Report 07/08
 - Brian Turner advised that the Dept of Mines send safety alerts via an email subscription and also upload them on their website. He also noted that it is important that any incidents remain anonymous so that individuals are not unfairly penalised for incidents.
 - The purpose of reporting incidents should be to encourage safety and awareness and not create a culture of fear.
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- Daryl McGregor suggested that reuse of effluent needs to be discussed as approvals are taking too long in NSW compared with Victoria.
 - The national guidelines on effluent reuse need to be updated and include practitioner input.
 - Chris Davis suggested that there are too many guidelines on effluent reuse and that is making it confusing for industry staff to determine whether they are meeting the standards.
 - Greg Searle noted that the lack of staff in NSW is what is causing the delay in approvals.
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- Stewart McLeod inquired how councils are coping with the Australian Drinking Water Quality Framework.
 - Sam Samra noted that seven NSW councils have the framework in place and 50% of water authorities nationally have adopted the framework.
 - Greg Mashiah stated that councils should test the part of their system that is most likely to fail, not the best performing section as this is misleading.
 - Greg Finlayson mentioned that bore water and rainwater tanks can be a source of contamination.
 - Sam Samra defended the boil water alerts included in the DWE report as a signifier of problems that must be addressed by the LWU.

Recommendations and actions:

- Executive Committee to discuss the issue of sharing HACCP incidents at the next planning meeting in November.
- Look at which effluent guidelines we can recommend to members councils at the planning meeting in November.
- Ask for feedback through the newsletter about the implementation of the Australian Drinking Water Quality Framework.