



**WATER MANAGERS' FORUM
THURSDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2011
WATER MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE, GRAFTON 2011**

Panellists:

Wayne Beatty	Orange City Council
Anthony Burnham	Tweed Shire Council
Carmel Krogh	Shoalhaven Water
Wayne Franklin	Rous Water

For a ninth 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: PUBLIC HEALTH ACT 2010

Issues raised and discussed:

- The *Public Health Act 2010* is expected to commence in 2012. The Act requires drinking water suppliers to establish, and adhere to, a quality assurance program that complies with the Regulations.
- Four pilot projects are currently being conducted by Atom Consulting and NSW Public Works on behalf of NSW Health to demonstrate to LWUs how to implement the requirements of the new Act.
- Anthony Burnham of Tweed Shire Council provided a brief summary of this topic and asked attendees for suggestions on how the requirements of the new *Public Health Act 2010* can be implemented.
- Murray Thompson, formerly of Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, suggested that LWUs conduct a workshop with their local NSW Health Public Health Unit and develop an MoU that can be implemented.
- Carmel Krogh emphasised that it is important that any implementation of water management plans is consistent around the State.
- Sandy Leask, NSW Health, suggested that the Alliances being formed by LWUs are a good way to ensure consistency across a number of councils. He also advised that the report on the pilot projects should be released in about 2 months time.
- Annalisa Contos, Atom Consulting, suggested that the Water Directorate prepare a template scope of works on behalf of members to ensure tenders were consistent and also complied with the requirements of the Regulations.
- Kamal Fernando, Office of Public Works, agreed that the Alliance model used by the LMWUA was a good example of encouraging consistency amongst councils and should be encouraged. He also suggested that the Water Directorate could perhaps arrange to broker the tender on behalf of members and thereby increase the buying power for LWUs.
- David Byrne, Cooma Monaro Shire Council, commented that the implementation of quality frameworks and systems across council areas is lacking and that the implementation of water quality management plans should be a good demonstration for the whole of council.
- All attendees agreed that the sharing of resources is the ideal option.

Recommendations and actions:

- Executive Committee to consider the development of a template scope of works for members to tender for the development of water management plans at the Planning Meeting in November 2011.
- Murray Thompson to seek permission for the Mid North Coast MoU to be approved as a public document and distributed to the members of the Water Directorate for information purposes.

PANEL TWO: WATER OPERATOR TRAINING

Issues raised and discussed:

- Carmel Krogh, Shoalhaven Water, introduced this topic and advised that there are a confusing number of agencies, government bodies and acronyms that are part of the Vocational Education and Training industry. Currently, she is the Water Directorate's representative on the Government Skills Australia (GSA) Water Industry Advisory Committee (WIAC).
- At present there are a number of initiatives to develop a national framework for training in the water industry. The Water Directorate is liaising with GSA, AWA, the Water Training Assessment Network of ITAB, the NSW Office of Water (NOW) and WIOA on various training issues.
- There is momentum building for the development of a national certification for water operators that is streamlined and nationally available. This certification would be available for new entrants to the industry and also recognise prior learning so that experienced employees can also receive formal qualifications.
- Various attendees mentioned the different courses their staff attend to gain qualifications. These include Geelong TAFE, NOW Training and distance education from an RTO in Queensland.
- Sam Samra, NOW, advised that the operator training that his department delivers is more comprehensive than other training courses available nationally and is the only training the State Government also authorises. Eighty five percent of the feedback received about this training is good.
- Sam Samra also advised that his department is not involved in the development of a national framework but is participating in the development of certification with GSA. The NOW is concerned that the number of core subject and electives undertaken for certification will not be rigorous enough. Regardless, NOW insists that all operators must be suitably qualified.
- In general attendees agreed that training provided by NOW is of a high standard, however, several attendees also noted that NOW is providing the training and regulating the training, raising a conflict of interest issue.
- Belinda Green, Kempsey Shire Council, commented that the NOW training was difficult to complete because it is held in 'one block' and that there is a lot to comprehend in one or two weeks of study. She argued that it would be better to receive the training over a longer period of time from well qualified practitioners and on site where possible.
- Anne-Maree Burke, Kempsey Shire Council, advised that they are currently trialling a school leavers Certificate II to encourage entrants into the industry and that Kempsey has found the age span of applicants is very broad. This implies that there is wide appeal in working in the industry.
- Murray Thompson, formerly of Port Macquarie-Hastings, advised that he is now working at TAFE and that it would be ideal if an apprenticeship scheme was established for school leavers. He advised that Petra Kelly, AWA, is currently investigating the establishment of a four year apprenticeship scheme.
- Rod Batterham, Liverpool Plains Shire Council, commented that there is a lack of RTOs to deliver the training locally and that this is a major issue for LWUs.
- Carmel Krogh advised that as the Water Directorate's representative on the WIAC she will recommend that the best parts of the NOW training are included in the national framework.

Recommendations and actions:

- Carmel Krogh to continue attending the GSA meetings with the view of representing NSW issues and ideas in the development of a national framework.

PANEL THREE: FIRE FLOW DESIGN GUIDELINES

Issues raised and discussed:

- Wayne Franklin, Rous Water, provided a brief background on the development of the Water Directorate's latest technical guidelines. The document was distributed in July 2011 and provides guidance on the criteria and standards pertaining to fire flows in street hydrants as well as a literature review of fire flow standards around Australia.
- The Guidelines were written by Hunter Water Australia and peer reviewed by the Water Directorate's Water Subcommittee over a period of 12 months.
- Bruce Logan, Tamworth Regional Council, asked if the Guidelines posed any legal issues for councils.
- Wayne Franklin advised that the research was thorough, however, the Guidelines should only be used as a best practice guide, not as a legal document
- Ballina Shire Council suggested that the Water Directorate should also provide a technical specification if they are providing the technical advice.

Recommendations and actions:

- Encourage all member councils to adopt the *Fire Flow Design Guidelines*.

PANEL FOUR: DAM SAFETY INSPECTIONS

Issues raised and discussed:

- Wayne Beatty, Orange City Council, provided some background on this issue for the attendees. Back in 2009 Paul Heinrichs the Dam Safety Manager from NOW attended an Executive Committee meeting of the Water Directorate to advise of the policy shift to a risk based approach by the Dam Safety Committee (DSC).
- This policy change has meant that LWUs with dams are now required to comply with new standards and engage consultants to undertake dam safety inspection on a regular basis depending on the size of their dam.
- The Water Directorate has had a couple of meetings with State Water over the past 12 months to discuss the type of dam inspection service that they are able to offer our members. State Water is able to consult with local government and is keen for LWUs to engage their services.
- Wayne Beatty advised that Orange City Council has 5 dams and that the cost of inspections is going to be a large impost. Other attendees agreed with this assessment of the cost.
- Robert Bell, Uralla Shire Council, suggested that the Water Directorate develop a scope of works for member councils that can be used when tendering for dam safety and inspection contracts.
- Wayne Beatty asked attendees for comments on whether there should be a local government representation on the DSC. The former Minister, Phil Costa, declined our previous request because it is a highly specialised technical committee and it was deemed that someone from local government would not have the expertise.
- Gary Mitchell advised that Paul Heinrichs, retired from NOW, has offered his time to represent local government on the DSC if it is considered appropriate.
- Murray Thompson, formerly of Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, agreed that a local government representative on the DSC is crucial if local government is going to be able to implement the new policy direction, particularly if there is not extra money to undertake the inspections.
- Wayne Franklin and Anthony Burnham advised that they had recently let a joint tender for dam inspections for 5 years. The tender was awarded to State Water. Wayne and Anthony advised that they are happy to distribute a copy of the scope of works to Water Directorate members for information.

Recommendations and actions:

- Consider convening a workshop and invite LWU dam owners to come and discuss issues more fully.
- Consider drafting scope of works at the dam workshop for members to use when tendering for dam safety and inspection contracts.
- Wayne Franklin and Anthony Burnham to forward a copy of their joint scope of works to Gary Mitchell for distribution and/or discussion at the proposed workshop.
- Lobby the Minister for Primary Industries, The Hon Kristina Hodgkinson MP, to seek her agreement for a nomination representative from local government being appointed to the Dam Safety Committee.

PANEL FIVE: BUILDING IN THE VICINITY OF WATER AND SEWER MAINS / EXEMPT AND COMPLYING DEVELOPMENTS

Issues raised and discussed:

- Carmel Krogh introduced this topic and outlined for the attendees some of the conflicting issues regarding developers having development applications approved by a private certifier and not being told of the location of water and/or sewer mains.
- The potential is that structures will be built over LWU water and sewer mains causing actual or potential damage or restricted access for maintenance purposes.
- The Water Directorate is seeking feedback from member councils on any examples where this may have occurred so we can put these to the Department of Planning and argue for a change in the legislation. The ideal situation is that local government would have the same approvals system as Sydney Water and Hunter Water which have to stamp each and every development.
- Anne-Maree Burke, Kempsey Shire Council, advised that they are experiencing difficulties with private certifiers. MidCoast advised that they intentionally have developed good relationships private certificates in their LGA to ensure they are aware of any proposed developments over council water and sewer mains or infrastructure.
- Attendees agreed that there are few resources to guide staff to assess applications fairly or provide advice about the types of mains that can be built over.
- Carmel Krogh also advised about the conflicting issues regarding S64 charges and how her LWU is unfairly compared to the charges of Sydney Water (none) by developers who are building in the south of Sydney region.
- The need for S64 contributions is crucial for LWUs to remain solvent and in a position to maintain services at a high standard.

Recommendations and actions:

- Water Directorate to prepare a summary paper of the issues and circulate it to members for comments/feedback.

PANEL SIX: ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS

Issues raised and discussed:

- Wayne Beatty introduced this topic and asked attendees to comment on the environmental flow policy that operates in their various regions.
- In September 2010 a representative from NOW was invited to the Water Directorate Executive Committee meeting to provide an overview of environmental flow policy and explain why there is a perception that it is implemented differently across the State.
- Tony Perry, Central Tablelands County Council, commented that building dams in the future may not be possible and the need for environmental flows will be higher than the increase in the secure yield from a new or improved dam.
- Wayne Franklin, Rous Water, commented that he had the experience in 1995 and again recently when increasing the size of Rocky Creek Dam.
- Murray Thompson, formerly Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, noted that environmental flow licences are for 10 years and that LWUs should beware that the policy may change after the 10 years are up.
- Wayne Beatty, Orange City Council, advised that the DSC have instructed them to upgrade the safety of one of their dams but it will mean loss of yield.

Recommendations and actions:

- Water Directorate keeps a watching brief on this issue.