



**WATER MANAGERS' FORUM  
TUESDAY 25 AUGUST 2015  
2015 LGNSW WATER MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE,  
PEPPERS CRAIGEBURN, BOWRAL NSW**

**Chair**

Gary Mitchell

**Panellists:**

Bruce Logan  
David Oxenham  
Murray Thompson  
Stewart McLeod  
Heiz Kausche

The Water Managers' Forum was held at the LGNSW 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 water utilities.

The opinions expressed at the Water Managers' Forum by individuals do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Water Directorate or the LG 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](mailto:info@waterdirectorate.asn.au) or posted on the Water Directorate's Discussion Forum at: [www.waterdirectorate.asn.au/DiscussionForum/TechnicalIssues.aspx](http://www.waterdirectorate.asn.au/DiscussionForum/TechnicalIssues.aspx)

**PANEL ONE: Merging of Water Utilities in the event of council amalgamations, what are the challenges?**

**Discussion Leader: Bruce Logan Tamworth Regional Council**

**Issues raised and discussed:**

- Bruce Logan gave a brief summary of the issues encountered with the merging of water utilities in the amalgamation of Tamworth Regional Council.
- Issues encountered, which were subsequently overcome, included:
  - Combining 5 funds to support smaller Councils
  - Very different water charge rates initially, which has taken 5 years to overcome
  - Assets, including Asset information and condition were very different between Councils
  - Regulations and enforcement were initially different between members. For example EPA enforcement became very stringent post amalgamation.
  - Reduced amount of Country Water Supply
  - Different IT systems and inventory control, which must become centralised
  - Staffing issues, included larger Councils had staff who were dedicated to Water & Sewage, whilst smaller Councils had staff members, who were more generalists and 'jack of all trades'.
  - Staff of different Councils may have employment contracts with different terms and conditions
  - Operational procedures may differ slightly between depots
  - Different requirements at different depots may take 7 – 8 years to sort out.
- Benefits of larger size of water utility, include:
  - Cost efficiency with more justification for more equipment
  - Succession planning
  - An example was provided with Clarence Valley, where distance impacts upon efficiency
- **Recommendations and actions:**
- Bruce advised to start thinking about an amalgamation now. For example, it would be a mistake to keep North Coast Water separate from North Coast Sewer.
- The 90 day rule to apply so that all systems are in place within 90days.
- The Tamworth amalgamation achieved all of its objectives

## **PANEL TWO: Problems of Telecommunications equipment in Water Services Property**

**Discussion Leader: Murray Thompson, Murray Thompson Water Services P/L**

- Telecommunications equipment is acceptable where it is safe with sufficient access.
- However, concerns do arise with potential contamination of service reservoirs.

What can be done?

- Survey Industry
- Access Drinking Water Management Plan
- There is a potential role for the Water Directorate to act as an intermediary with the Telecommunications industry
- Greg McDonald observed that larger Telecommunications Service providers were more respectful of Water Service provider's needs, where the smaller operators were not as respectful

### **Recommendations and actions:**

- Before taking any action must decide whether it has the potential to become a 'health issue'
- Place a monopole on site as opposed to on water assets. For example, Coffs Council put up a monopole and rents out the space
- Brendan Guiney – Has successfully stopped industry entering reservoirs
- Ask for the whole lease, read it carefully in detail
- Draw up a Standard Access Agreement beforehand
- Tweed Council has determined not to renew Lease Agreement except on their terms
- Hunter H2O requiring a 'Structural Check'
- Water Centres are still responsible for WHS around the Telcos
- Ensure a clause for subletting of access is in place
- Ensure there is sufficient access for Emergency Services
- All installations must have EME report
- Some modern drawings do have 'access information'

### **PANEL THREE: Water Industry Training – What is required?**

- **Discussion Leader: David Oxenham, Tweed Shire Council**

#### **Background**

- Water Industry Skills Taskforce set up
- National Certification of Water Treatment
- GSA to exist until December 2015
- New Training Packages available for comment
- New structure – Skilled Service organization
- Industry Reference Committee (IRC) set up
- In NSW Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) are key industry contacts for the NSW Government. They provide independent industry advice on the training and skill needs of industry which will facilitate workforce development
- New Arrangements for Training Product Development for Australian Industry Australian Industry and Skills Committee
  - Advise on VET quality instruments (Provider Standards and Training Package Standards)
  - Endorse qualifications
  - Provide industry input to guide VET research
  - Provide industry input to ministerial council

#### **What role should NSW Water Directorate Play?**

- Engage Jenny Janes to conduct a survey. Survey findings displayed size of industry, training required etc
- Feedback displayed a need for brokerage services, with a better co-ordination of skills and needs.
- Roll out mapping exercise with Councils to identify gaps
- ROC's currently have a range of training services
- **Consensus in the room revealed that an effective way to get training across to staff members was to use local trainers, or do training themselves**

## **PANEL FOUR: Water Sensitive Urban Design**

- **Discussion Leader: Stewart McLeod, Dubbo City Council**

### **Background**

- NSW has best data set eg. 28000rainwater tanks
- 2 years have been required to provide information
- Problem obtaining data
- 26 utilities provided information
- 130 km stormwater channels
- Customer bills could be a key contact point – Great idea if well maintained.
- Maintenance costs of units
- Performance data is very important

### **Project Opportunities**

- Heinz noted with water recycling if there is a gap to provide Councils with guidelines for Water Recycling
- Is there a project opportunity and how does it justify investment?
- Brendan observed that Qld Water Directorate is working on a project
- Sam Sara – No docs on website
- Document which is an advisory notice for what Water Directorate may like to do
- Case Studies may be useful

## **Guidelines for Water Recycling**

### **▪ Discussion Leader: Heinz Kausche, Wagga Wagga City Council**

- This project is about how the Directorate may be able to support and/or assist Water Utilities with addressing the 12 elements of the Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling (AGWR).
- Based on the experiences of Wagga Wagga City Council the process can be complex, time consuming and costly.
- Wagga reuses about 5,500mL of treated effluent per annum for the irrigation of sporting fields and for agriculture. The reuse systems have been operational since the early 1980's and Council has been working through the process of achieving Section 60 approval for the reuse schemes and addressing the 12 elements of the AGWR for several years. This process has been both time consuming and expensive for the Council.
- Council has managed to complete the application for Section 60 approval for the agricultural reuse scheme attached to one of its smaller STP's but is still working through the process for its two major plants which provide reuse water for the irrigation of several sporting fields.
- Based on the experiences of Wagga and other water utilities, the Water Directorate is considering how it may be able to assist other utilities with addressing the 12 elements of the Australian Water Recycling Guidelines and achieving Section 60 approval for effluent reuse schemes. This could be in the form of developing guiding documents supported by case studies and other relevant information.
- Recognising that there is a lot of material already provided by DPI Water and other organisations nationally, that have already done a lot of work in this space. The project is intended to lever off this work and not duplicate work that has already been done. It is intended that the project will focus on gaps in information or areas where utilities would benefit most from additional resources and guidance.

Scope for the guiding document could include;

- Guidance on the investment decision making process related to the viability of implementing an effluent reuse system
- General discussion on the process supported by case studies, example management plans, end user agreements and other relevant documentation
- Guidance on the process for undertaking log reduction validations – this has proven to be a complex area for Wagga requiring the sourcing of specialist advice

- Legal advice around third party end user agreements (risk & liability for utility).

Water Directorate is keen to receive feedback from other utilities to establish if this is a project that should be progressed and if so, gather some ideas on what should be included