



**WATER
DIRECTORATE**
WATER MANAGERS' FORUM
THURSDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2005
WATER MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE, NARRABRI 2005

For a third year, the Water Managers' Forum was held at the LGSA Water Management Conference. The Forum was organised by the Water Directorate and it was again very capably facilitated by Adrian Wells, Manager Upper Murray, Murray Darling Association.

The Water Managers' Forum aims to discuss topics pertinent to water managers in local government. Approximately 100 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 those of the Water Directorate nor 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: WATER SAFETY FORUM

Panellists:

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|----------------|-------------------------|
| John Werda* | Sydney Water |
| Paul McGrath | Sydney Water |
| Chris Halliday | Country Energy |
| John Gould | Shoalhaven City Council |
| Stewart McLeod | Dubbo City Council |

(*denotes presenter)

Issues raised:

- ☐ Safety issues have become more important in recent months with the death of a Sydney Water employee by electrocution.
- ☐ Safety is an important issue for Sydney Water management, employees of the utility as well as plumbers and drainers and the resident of the house as the risk of electrocution is increasing.
- ☐ Nowadays electricity in many houses is not effectively earthed because of the change in recent years from using steel/iron water pipes to plastic water pipes.
- ☐ Increased use of polypipe means that the issue of effectively earthing the house for electricity will remain a problem for the life of the pipes and until the polypipe is replaced with metallic pipes.
- ☐ Lack of standards across the industry and nationally has created a problem for managers who have to advise employees on safe work practices.
- ☐ Sydney Water has a new 2 day training package that has to be completed by all work site staff. Testing for the presence of electricity in the water supply is now mandatory and, if found, all work is ceased and the electricity supplier is notified.
- ☐ Other sources of concern include contaminated soil, energy released from other sources e.g. neighbour's house or the meter and establishing contact with the electricity supplier quickly.

Outcomes for consideration:

- ☐ A show of hands indicated support for the establishment of a Water Safety Forum. The best organisation to host the Forum needs to be identified. At this stage, DEUS is considered the best option.
- ☐ Support from attendees for a set of consistent standards to be developed for the NSW industry. Check with WorkCover to verify if any standards are being developed.
- ☐ Better communication between the power and water utilities needs to be established so a quick and positive outcome is achieved

PANEL TWO: WATER LOSS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM FOR NSW REGIONAL WATER AUTHORITIES

Panellists:

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| Daryl McGregor* | Water Directorate and Albury Water |
| Gary Mitchell* | Water Directorate |
| Robert Bell* | LGSA |
| John Gould | Shoalhaven City Council |
| Stewart McLeod | Dubbo City Council |

(*denotes presenter)

Issues raised:

- A joint submission by the Water Directorate and LGSA was made to the National Water Council in June for funding of a state-wide Water Loss Management Program.
- Robert Bell noted that historically, water loss through leakages, and has not been closely monitored in NSW. International benchmark of 6% is considered good, particularly as empirical evidence in NSW during the early 1990s suggests that much higher water loss was being experienced.
- Daryl McGregor advised that the introduction of IWCM has highlighted water loss as an issue for councils. Recovering water lost through the system would help many councils that are currently seeking alternate water supplies.
- During the start up phase of the project, extensive information gathering will be necessary to reduce the guessing element about the levels of water loss across NSW.
- Queensland has new that requires the preparation of water loss programs and repair.
- Stewart McLeod advised that currently IPART have imposed a limit of 10% on Sydney Water. IPART may also impose a similar limit on regional water authorities in the future. NSW local government needs to be prepared for stricter controls and standards.
- Gary Mitchell provided an overview of the proposal and the breakup of the finances. He also explained the rationale for suggesting 33 councils in NSW participate in the project over the last three years of a four year program.
- Expressions of interest from councils will be sought prior to a final decision on which councils will be able to participate is made. Criteria for selecting councils have not yet been drafted.
- Note: Sydney Water is **not** included in the project.
- Note: Funding has not yet been approved by the NWC.

Outcomes for consideration:

- General consensus that this is a good and timely project proposal.
- Attendees express strong support for the project and many were interested in being involved.
- The choice of councils needs to be transparent and due diligence has to be carefully considered to avoid accusations of cronyism.
- A balance between large and small councils participating has to be achieved.
- Water Directorate to keep members informed of the progress of this submission.

PANEL THREE: NEXUS BETWEEN IWCM AND BASIX

Panellists:

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|-----------------|--|
| Adrian Langdon* | Department of Energy, Utilities and Sustainability |
| Andrew Porter* | Department of Planning |
| John Gould | Shoalhaven City Council |
| Stewart McLeod | Dubbo City Council |

(*denotes presenter)

Issues raised:

- Adrian Langdon provided an overview of the history and progress of the introduction of IWCM in NSW. He advised that the 12 initial pilot councils have largely completed their IWCMs and now a number of other councils have commenced the process.
- Andrew Porter provided an overview of the rationale of BASIX and its introduction to regional NSW councils. He acknowledged that BASIX is viewed with a mix of suspicion and resentment because of the confusion it has created with the additional requirements it places upon councils to inspect water efficient devices.
- He advised that a monitoring and evaluation program would be undertaken to ensure people do not cheat after their final inspection by removing energy efficient appliances.
- Attendees suggested that BASIX is very prescriptive approach to reducing water use and anecdotal evidence suggests that it can increase the cost of building a house by \$30,000.
- Rainwater tanks remain a very contentious issue with many councils expressing disappointment with the reintroduction of rainwater tanks and the confusion about the size required.
- Adrian Langdon cited the change in the Plumbing Code to allow topping up of tanks from mains water as an example of the responsiveness of the IWCM process.
- General consensus that the IWCM process needs to be completed by councils first so the results can then be used to complement BASIX requirements e.g. IWCM determines the size of rainwater tank required and then this is plugged into the requirements of BASIX for that particular council.
- Greater linkages between the two policies need to be established and highlighted.

Outcomes for consideration:

- Water Directorate and LGSA to discuss an extension of the IWCM introductory date with Minister Scully.
- Consensus that the establishment of a working group comprising DEUS, Department of Planning and the Water Directorate is a good idea.
- Working Group should try to encourage greater communication between the two departments to avoid or solve the conflicting requirements between these policies.
- Water Directorate to keep members informed of the outcomes of the Working Group.

PANEL FOUR: SAVEWATER!® ALLIANCE

Panellists:

Nigel Finney* CEO, savewater!® Alliance!
Michael Smit National Programs Manager, savewater!® Alliance!
John Morris Executive Manager Business Services, North East Region Water

(*denotes presenter)

Issues raised:

- The CEO of the savewater!® Alliance, Nigel Finney, gave a presentation on the financial and marketing benefits of joining the savewater!® Alliance
- savewater!® Alliance is a group of water authorities from Victoria that have joined together to provide water conservation information to their constituents via an individually branded website.
- Substantial economies of scale are available to councils from joining together and sharing resources and knowledge on water conservation issues.
- NSW water authorities are welcome to join immediately and can request an application form from savewater!® staff at the exhibition stand.
- NSW water authorities that may be intending to join but are not able to immediately make a financial commitment are also welcome to fill out an Expression of Interest form.
- An Expression of Interest form allows those NSW authorities to register for the first tranche of potential funding of the savewater!® Alliance.

Outcomes for consideration:

- A number of councils expressed an interest in finding out more information.
- Subsequent membership information will be forwarded shortly via the Water Directorate.
- *Note: The Water Directorate does not receive any financial benefits from forwarding this information.*

PANEL FIVE: O&M MANUAL FOR SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANTS

Panellists:

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| Larry Greentree* | Department of Commerce |
| Gary Mitchell* | Water Directorate |
| John Gould | Shoalhaven City Council |
| Stewart McLeod | Dubbo City Council |

(*denotes presenter)

Issues raised:

- Gary Mitchell provided a brief background to this project. To date, it is the largest project undertaken by the Water Directorate and cost more than \$70,000.
- The project is being jointly funded by Queensland Water Directorate and is the first co-funded project between the two associations.
- Larry Greentree provided a summary of each of the processes included in the O&M Manual. The most common processes were chosen to try and cover the majority of STPs across NSW. It was acknowledged that not all processes used in NSW are included due to size of the manual and practicalities.
- Extensive consultation with departmental staff, the Water Directorate's extended Sewer Subcommittee and the Queensland Water Directorate Subcommittee was undertaken during the drafting of the O&M Manual.
- The size of the manual (in excess of 1,000 pages) means that it will be distributed on CD Rom with instructions on how to use it.
- Implementation of the O&M Manual will be challenging for many councils and assistance will be required.
- Training may need to be process based so that attendees receive training that is relevant to their council.
- Expected release date of the CD Rom and O&M Manual is early October 2005.

Outcomes for consideration:

- A questionnaire to be included in the Manual folder to assist with determining what type of assistance is required to implement the manual at each council.
- Attendees were asked to indicate whether they preferred to attend regional workshops or received individual training. The show of hands was not conclusive. More feedback is required.