

Ozwater 2013 – Benefits Report

Conference Attendance Award 2013

Attending Ozwater in Perth provided an invaluable opportunity to hear from and talk with water industry professionals. It was a fantastic personal learning experience and I was able to bring back knowledge and information gained to MidCoast Water, to use in my day to day work and also to share with other employees.

For me, the highlight of the conference was hearing from and meeting one of the keynote speakers, Kusum Athukorala. She had many interesting observations on the water industry and believed that conferences, such as Ozwater, are beneficial as a 'seed' can be planted during one of the presentations or discussions, which can then be 'fertilised' some time later by further conversations, readings, or other means.

One of Kusum's other main points that stayed with me was the emphasis on the need for education on 'software' as well as 'hardware'. There have been many cases of communities in developing countries being given infrastructure, such as a toilet, that is subsequently used for storage once the construction team has left. They were not provided with the necessary education or 'software' to enable them to use the infrastructure as intended. Kusum said that 'building' people is less attractive to many due to the intangible results and the long term nature of the results. This has relevance, even in our region, as it shows the importance of community and stakeholder consultation in project success. A presentation on Clarence Valley Council's community engagement for the Iluka Sewerage Scheme demonstrated this point.

Community and stakeholder engagement is also important to the success of groundwater replenishment schemes using recycled water. One of my objectives was to learn more about groundwater replenishment, especially lessons learnt from other schemes and early considerations. I attended a couple of relevant presentations as well as the site visit to the Water Corp replenishment trial. I learnt of the long time frames required for agency and community consultation for these types of projects, and of the need for commitment, trust and transparency. Water Corp established an inter-agency working group, many years before the trial began, to develop a groundwater replenishment regulatory framework. They stressed the importance of buy-in and sign-off from the highest levels of all organisations involved. Their project has been a success, in part, due to the early consultation and education. With MidCoast Water considering such a scheme for the future, the practical experience of others will be instrumental in ensuring we get it right.

I spoke to other professionals about and attended several sessions on increasing efficiency and reducing operational costs. Hydraulic modelling of both water and sewer networks has been used in clever ways to reduce costs and to select the best solution. Much of this information will be beneficial to MidCoast Water as we will be able to use it to increase our own efficiency in practical ways.

I would like to thank the Water Directorate for the opportunity to attend Ozwater and gain knowledge from experts, other young water professionals, and conference sessions.

