



**WATER DIRECTORATE FORUM
TUESDAY 26 AUGUST 2014
WATER MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE, PORT MACQUARIE**

Panellists:

Stewart McLeod	Dubbo City Council
Wayne Beatty	Orange City Council
Jeff Sharp	Port Macquarie-Hastings Council
Wayne Franklin	Rous Water
Gary Mitchell	Water Directorate

For a twelfth year, the Water Directorate Forum was held at the LG NSW Water Management Conference. The Forum was organised by the Water Directorate and facilitated by the Executive Officer, Gary Mitchell.

The Water Directorate 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 Directorate 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 or posted on the Water Directorate's Discussion Forum at: www.waterdirectorate.asn.au/DiscussionForum/TechnicalIssues.aspx

PANEL ONE: Overview of Water Directorate Submissions

Discussion Leader: Stewart McLeod, Dubbo City Council and Jeff Sharp, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council

Issues raised and discussed:

- Stewart McLeod gave a brief summary of the recommendations made by the Water Directorate via submissions to various government inquiries since 2013.
- Over the past 12 months the Water Directorate has made five submissions:
 - Submission made to the National Water Commission's 2014 Triennial Assessment Urban Water Futures
 - Submission made to the Joint Review of the Water Industry Competition Act 2006 and Regulatory Arrangements for Water Recycling under the Local Government Act 1993
 - Submission made to the Local Government Acts Taskforce
 - Submission made to the Independent Local Government Review Panel Final Report

- Submission made to the NSW Legislative Assembly, Committee on Legal Affairs
- Stewart McLeod advised that preparing the submissions takes considerable amount of time and resources. He also commented that it is difficult to get an industry wide response together in a short space of time.
- Stewart acknowledged that Water Directorate was initially established as a technical advisory body and did not foresee a need to become and advocate for local government water utilities, this was the role of LG NSW. Therefore the Water Directorate has not resourced itself to undertake advocacy to date.
- There was discussion about the direction of the Water Directorate and whether it should get more political in the future and Stewart asked whether the Water Directorate should be more active in encouraging alliances, corporations or county councils.
- Warwick Pelly agreed that Water Directorate assistance in this area would be helpful.
- Greg Ryan noted that Water Research Australia see WSAA as the lobby group for large utilities.
- However, another audience member noted that when an organisation is a lobby group then the technical expertise of the organisation can be undermined.
- Wayne Franklin suggested that since the loss of the LG NSW Water Committee there has been less emphasis on water issues and less interaction with politicians.
- Robert Bell agreed that the removal of the LG NSW Water Committee was a mistake and that perhaps the Water Directorate regions should be proposed to the LG NSW as a model for building regional alliances.
- Carmel Krogh argued that lobbying is not the role of the Water Directorate and that providing direct assistance to the Minister would be preferable.
- Rob Fearon advised that the Qld Water Directorate is doing lots of lobbying on behalf of its members and that recently QWRAP was established to encourage the formation of alliances.
- Myles Humphries suggested that the ROC model is better than the Water Directorate's nine regions because it is already a well recognised structure.
- MidCoast Water Chair stated that the cost of borrowing money is the real reason that councils are struggling and that this issue needs to be addressed first.

Recommendations and actions:

- No clear consensus was reached on this issue by the Forum attendees.
- The Water Directorate Executive Committee to discuss this issue further at its next Executive Committee meeting.
- The Water Directorate Executive Committee to consider how it can encourage the establishment of alliances or corporations or county councils.

PANEL TWO: BACKFLOW PREVENTION AND CROSS CONNECTION CONTROL

Discussion Leader: Wayne Franklin, Rous Water

Issues raised and discussed:

- Wayne Franklin asked the Forum attendees asked the following questions of the Forum attendees:
 - Is everyone is taking backflow prevention seriously?
 - Does everyone agree that the legislative tools to prevent backflow are defective?
 - Does everyone agree that the Australian standards are unsatisfactory from a LWU perspective?
- Nanda Alta villa from the NSW Office of Water agreed that NOW would like to see the Plumbing Code of Australia (PCA) tightened as it currently has gaps.
- Stewart McLeod explained that the LMWUA is ensuring with the assistance of a consultant that all 12 member councils are doing backflow in a consistent manner.
- Elizabeth Knight from Gosford City Council advised that there is a Backflow Prevention Association and that Gosford is a member.
- Graham Samson noted that fiddling with the Local Government Act 1993 may not be the right vehicle for getting the legislative changes that are being sought.
- Wayne Franklin commented that it doesn't matter where the legislation sits as long as it clearly enunciates the correct technical outcome.

Recommendations and actions:

- Wayne Franklin to investigate whether the Water Directorate can become a member of the Backflow Prevention Association. <http://www.bpaq.org.au/>
- Water Directorate Executive Committee to keep advising members on backflow prevention issues and developments.

PANEL THREE: DAM OWNERS GROUP

Discussion Leader: Wayne Beatty, Orange City Council

Issues raised and discussed:

- Wayne Beatty advised that 60 percent of Water Directorate members own dams and that the Dam Safety Workshops and Management Forum have been very well attended by members wanting to have more information on dams.
- He advised that Australian National Committee on Large Dams (ANCOLD) has advised the Water Directorate that a national forum is proposed for the first half of 2014. A national forum has widespread support and should probably be integrated with the national conference.
- The purpose of a national forum will be to provide dam owners, river operators and system/catchment operators with an opportunity to share their experiences, discuss common and current issues, learn from each other, benchmark their programmes, and develop their networks.
- Wayne Beatty will attend the Forum on behalf of the Water Directorate. Other members of the Water Directorate will also be encouraged to attend when the details are available.

- Eloise Stanley asked Forum attendees if they were interested in receiving copies of ANCOLD publications. ANCOLD has a wide selection of publications on dam construction, maintenance and operations. There was little interest expressed in receiving these publications.
- There was no update on the KPMG review of the *Dam Safety Act 1978* and Dam Safety Committee to report.

Recommendations and actions:

- Wayne Beatty to attend the ANCOLD Conference in Brisbane on behalf of the Water Directorate Executive Committee
- Water Directorate to advertise and promote the ANCOLD regional forum when it is being held to members
- Keep a watching brief on dam issues through the Dam Subcommittee.

PANEL FOUR: FLUORIDATION OF PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIES

Discussion Leader: Wayne Franklin, Rous Water

Issues raised and discussed:

- Wayne Franklin provided a brief history of the fluoridation of public water supplies for Rous Water. He advised that Rous were first asked by NSW Health to include fluoride in the water supplies 8 years ago. However, only 3 of the 4 constituent councils agreed (Byron Shire rejected it). This has meant that the cost of the project as well as the operating costs doubled as a separate treatment plant needed to be built for the water supply to Byron Shire.
- Protest groups in the area also took Rous Water to the Land and Environment Court which delayed the project by 3.5 years.
- Jeff Sharp concurred that a large amount of time is consumed by protest groups when implementing new systems or technologies.
- Wayne Franklin argued that the introduction of fluoride is a public health issue at the LWUs should not be the proponents of fluoride but the delivery mechanisms.
- Paul Byleveld, NSW Ministry of Health, invited the Water Directorate to meet with the Health Minister to explain the position from a LWU perspective. He also advised councils to speak with their local PHUs if they have issues as they can assist with the response to protesters.
- Greg Mashiah noted that many of the complaints in his area are from non residents and can be as far away as Sydney or overseas. The protest groups are often a network of people that are anti fluoride anywhere in the world.
- Duncan Day, Byron Bay, argued against fluoridation when it was proposed at Byron Shire. He argued that it should be an individual choice whether fluoride is ingested through the water system.
- Graeme Haley advised that when he was General Manager at Deniliquin the introduction of fluoride was advocated by the local residents who saw it as beneficial to their long term healthcare. Deniliquin Council gave the residents the option of installing a reverse osmosis system and only 23 requested this device. In the end the small amount of opposition to fluoride died away.
- Paul Byleveld noted that it is the only instance of people power in NSW introducing fluoride.

Recommendations and actions:

- Wayne Franklin to follow up with Paul Byleveld re meeting the Health Minister.

PANEL FIVE: CURRENT PROJECTS & OPEN DISCUSSION FORUM

Discussion Leader: Gary Mitchell, Water Directorate

Issues raised and discussed:

- Gary Mitchell advised the Forum attendees about the various projects that are being undertaken by the Water Directorate over the next 12 months including a revision of three previous documents (O&M Manual for STPS, O&M Manual for Chlorination Installations and Drought Management Guidelines) and preparation of two new documents (Infiltration/Rehabilitation and Sewer Lining Specification and Review of the NSW Public Works Sewer Design Manual : Sewer Grading Tables).
- He also invited issues from the Forum attendees and received the following suggestions:
 - MidCoast Water suggested the preparation of a draft LWU Act to the State Government as a indicator of how LWUs would like the Act to operate rather than trying to amend the existing acts.
 - Clarence Valley Council suggested the Water Directorate look at what is included in fire retardants and ensure the contents do not affect the drinking water supplies.
 - Shoalhaven Water suggested that a frank discussion about how WSAA, AWA and the Water Directorate should work together needs to take place.
 - Gidi Azar from HydroScience asked if his company could become an associate member of the Water Directorate. Stewart McLeod advised that the Water Directorate constitution does not permit companies to become associate members. It is not anticipated that this will be reviewed in the near future.
 - Clarence Valley Council asked about progress on developing a chemical tender. Wayne Franklin advised that he had had a recent teleconference on the subject with Coffs Harbour and Ballina and that a draft paper has been produced.
 - Graham Samson suggested that the Water Directorate hold a workshop on how to prepare Regional Water Plans.
 - Stewart McLeod asked if anyone in the audience had any comments on the liveability and sustainability indices required by the Office of Local Government. There was general agreement that councils do not currently collect or collate data that is useful for the indices.
 - A representative from NSW Office of Water advised that there will be a two day seminar on the planning system at the end of November.

Recommendations and actions:

- Comments and suggestions are noted and will be considered by the Water Directorate Executive Committee.