

# FNQ Regional Water Alliance

## Minutes

<b>Meeting Name</b>	FNQ Regional Water Alliance – Meeting no. 30
<b>Date</b>	18 February 2022
<b>Time</b>	10.00am – 1.00pm
<b>Venue</b>	Committee Room, Level 3, Cairns Regional Council

## Attendance

Name	Organisation
Toni Veronese	Cairns Regional Council
Ada Pasanen	Douglas Shire Council
David Fletcher	Etheridge Shire Council
Jon Turner	Tablelands Regional Council
Simon Page	Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Manu Gravatt	Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Morris Hamill	Mareeba Shire Council
Peter Tonkes	Cook Shire Council
Robyn Maddalena	Cook Shire Council
Ingrid Fomiatti Minnesma	DRDMW
Dinesha Emmery	DRDMW
Daniel Harris	DRDMW
Ryan Cosgrove	qldwater
Chris Blake	QLD Health
Rodney Dedman	QLD Health
Wendy Hughes	FNQROC
Amanda Hancock	FNQROC

# Apologies

Name	Organisation
Gene Brooks	Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council
Peter Martin	Hinchinbrook Shire Council
Victor Mills	Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council
Andrew Healy	Croydon Shire Council
Sam Bann	Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council

## 1. Welcome and apologies

W Hughes opened the meeting at 10.05am and thanked all for making time to attend. With several new representatives in attendance brief introductions were made around the room.

W Hughes confirmed this would be her final meeting and that a replacement Regional Strategic Infrastructure Coordinator would be announced soon.

## 2. Confirmation of previous minutes

Minutes noted and accepted.

## 3. Business arising

Item	Action	Responsible
<b>Action 29.1</b>	W Hughes to circulate DRDMW presentation on Cairns water security, water storage economics, and Building our Regions Round 6 with the minutes.	W Hughes
<b>Item Update:</b> Complete.		
<b>Action 29.2</b>	Regional update on outcomes of the DWQMP incident response guidelines review to be scheduled for a future water alliance meeting. W Hughes to liaise with C Blake on best dates.	W Hughes/ C Blake
<b>Item Update:</b> In Progress. Incident response guidelines are still under review.		
<b>Action 29.3</b>	W Hughes to update the Alliance on Jobs Queensland regional workforce plan outcomes when known.	W Hughes
<b>Item Update:</b> Ongoing. Refer Agenda Item 6.		
<b>Action 29.4</b>	W Hughes to circulate qldwater presentation update with the minutes.	W Hughes
<b>Item Update:</b> Complete.		
<b>Action 29.5</b>	Alliance members to nominate regional procurement sub-committee representatives to inform initial project scoping and market sounding for proposed new projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Fire hydrant servicing and maintenance</li> <li>b) Water main air scouring and flushing maintenance</li> </ul>	Councils

	c) Sewer main fogging maintenance Councils nominated representatives need to be suitably authorised to share data with both FNQROC and other committee members.	
<b>Item Update:</b> Councils to nominate representatives. Refer Agenda Item 7.		
<b>Action 29.6</b>	A Hancock to schedule a regional procurement sub-committee meeting in the first quarter of 2022 to undertake initial project scoping of proposed new Water Alliance procurement initiatives.	A Hancock
<b>Item Update:</b> On hold pending advice of sub-committee nominations.		
<b>Action 29.7</b>	C Blake to seek clarification on implications of mandatory COVID vaccinations in relation to water service operators in FNQ and provide information back to Alliance members.	C Blake
<b>Item Update:</b> The CHO direction for 'COVID-19 Vaccination Requirements for Workers in a high-risk setting Direction' (Effective from: 8:30am AEST 11 December 2021) does not identify locations where water operators would typically work i.e. WTP as a high-risk setting that requires vaccination to enter. If they needed to access a high risk setting e.g. schools, correctional facilities, defined areas within an airport, etc then they need to comply with the COVID-19 vaccination requirements. (NOTE: this is current as of 18 Jan and is subject to change.)		
<b>Action 29.8</b>	W Hughes to liaise with R Cosgrove on scheduling a regional update by the Brisbane-based DRDMW policy team at a future water alliance meeting.	W Hughes/ R Cosgrove
<b>Item Update:</b> Complete. Refer Agenda Item 4.		
<b>Action 29.9</b>	W Hughes to circulate date claimers for 2022 Water Alliance meetings.	W Hughes
<b>Item Update:</b> Complete		

Actions from minutes were noted and accepted with the following update:

- **Actions 29.5 and 29.6** – following discussions at Agenda Item 7, both actions are now Complete.

#### 4. Regulatory / Policy Updates

##### Dept Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water

*Update from Ingrid Fomiatti Minnesma, Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water (DRDMW), Cairns Office*

- Update provided on Cairns Water Security Stage 1. All on track from DRDMW perspective. No regulatory issues.
- Water supply regulation update – Councils will be invited to attend a support workshop and network meeting at end March. Date and details to be confirmed closer to the time.
- Compliance and support visits took place for Indigenous councils late last year.
- Tablelands Water Assessments – working group met Friday 4 February. Communications strategy to be distributed shortly.
- Building Our Regions program round 6 – applications for planning projects have closed. Applications for detailed projects are open now.

**Action 30.1:** W Hughes to circulate DRDMW Cairns presentation on Cairns Water Security – Stage 1, Cairns Water Supply Regulation, Tablelands Regional Water Assessments, and Building our Regions Round 6 with the minutes.

*Update from Dinesha Emmerly, Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water (DRDMW), Brisbane Office.*

- Update provided on QWRAP program. Previously an annual allocation, now attracts permanent base funding of \$2M per annum.
- Independent review underway of how the program can be delivered more effectively. Includes looking at direct / indirect benefits and lessons learned.
- Future priorities include better planning for water and wastewater infrastructure services.
- Examples of regionally driven activities to date include WIW, training hubs, skills audit/resource sharing, sewer relining, SCADA assessments, biosolids disposal.
- Role of FNQROC in leading change was acknowledged.
- Online KPI comparative report – data provided through SWIM. Invitations to participate will be circulated to councils. Concept design completed, now starting to build it out.
- Operator competency policy – industry advocating for mandated minimum qualifications. Department exploring what the industry needs and what can be delivered to achieve the outcomes required.
- Expert sessions pilot – 8 small and remote councils provided with access to 3 industry experts. Key themes for questions were asset management, asset condition assessments, DWQMP.
- Workshop scheduled in 2 weeks as part of qldwater skills forum. Pre-workshop session to gather feedback on the operator competency issue.

**Action 30.2:** W Hughes to circulate the DRDMW Brisbane presentation on QWRAP with the minutes.

*I Fomiatti Minnesma and D Harris left the meeting 10.20am.*

#### Environmental Health Services, QLD Health

*Update from Chris Blake and Rodney Dedman, Environmental Health Services - Tropical Public Health Services, QLD Health*

- Update to incident response guidelines close to being finalised. Alliance update will be provided when the guidelines are ready to circulate.
- Reminder – auditing of recycled water schemes is pending. Department has trialled with southern providers and is making changes to the tool, expect this to be finalised and shared by April. When finalised, audit tool will be published online so everyone can see how the tool will be working.
- Update on vaccination requirements for water operators:
  - Declaration of public health emergency currently in place until 31 March, expect it to be extended. CHO directions currently under review state-wide which includes vaccination requirements.
  - If working in a high-risk setting, mandatory vaccination requirements are in place. Not specific to water – key language here is ‘high risk’. Language has also changed to ‘up to date vaccinations’ instead of ‘double vaccinated’. If eligible for booster, this can be considered essential.
  - Aged care, hospitals, health facilities are mandated for up to date vaccinations. If water operators are entering any of these venues, must be fully vaccinated unless the service can be delivered after hours and contact free.
- In December the Department was redirected to COVID response instead of BAU – have only just switched back. Expect to see more focus on compliance plan again.

- Meeting held with water supply regulator Thursday 17 February, key topics discussed:
  - Health-based targets flagged as coming back on the agenda. No set timeframe at this stage. Councils encouraged to be proactive and start talking about this early. There has historically been a focus on source-water assessments. 2015 manual a good place to start in preparing for health-based targets review.
  - Tentative dates for regulatory update workshop – 21/22 March. QLD Health invited to present. Opportunity for councils to request specific topics be covered through this update, for example THMs, safe and healthy drinking water program, health-based targets. Contact Chris or Rodney directly with suggestions.
- New Senior Environmental Health Officer for Water, Chris Land has been appointed. Will soon be scheduling 'meet and greets' across all councils.
- Indigenous workshops held last year – key content was safe drinking water and lessons learned. Support from Cook Shire and Cairns Regional Councils was acknowledged.

**Action 30.3:** To assist councils to prepare for a health-based targets review, W Hughes to circulate *Manual for the application of Health-Based Targets for Drinking Water Safety, September 2015* with the minutes.

## 5. qldwater

*Update from Ryan Cosgrove, qldwater*

- Water Skills Forum planned for Thursday 3 March. Hybrid event – can attend in person or online. Structured to reflect lifecycle of a water worker to encourage discussion around how to attract and retain staff through each of the stages. Director-General attending last session.
- QLD Water Tour to be held in FNQ this year (week commencing Monday 16 May). State officials from Brisbane to travel around indigenous communities and smaller councils to understand the challenges being faced on the ground.
- Port Douglas Regional Conference scheduled one week after the tour (Monday 23 – Tuesday 24 May). Chris Mooney and local DES team will be attending.
- SCADA micro credentials workshop – there are still spots left. Further details available [online](#).
- ERA 63 model condition 3 consultation underway.
- Exposure standards – changes to H2S and chlorine limits at national level. H2S limits are so low they're not realistically achievable by industry. Advocacy push underway to have these reviewed.
- Subathra Ramachandram recently left LGAQ (water advocacy lead). New person to be recruited soon.
- Asset criticality tool – conversion to web-based format is almost complete. Will automate the results and can be customised by councils. Potentially ready for further testing by May/June.

*D Emmerly, T Veronesi and C Blake left the meeting at 11.02am*

## 6. Regional Workforce Plan

- Regional submission tabled at Jobs QLD Board meeting in December. Informal feedback received:
  - potentially interested as a project for FY 2022/2023 but there are concerns about it covering a small workforce in a small sector that's operating in the regions
  - Jobs QLD toolkit believed to provide enough guidance to complete the work locally
- Next steps from here:
  - ongoing discussions with qldwater to keep project top of mind during meetings with Jobs QLD
  - develop a framework to operationalise the proposal – be more specific on what the region needs as an outcome of workforce planning
  - consider collaborative resourcing models which may help get Jobs QLD across the line

- Key messages we need to keep promoting:
  - we don't have resources or capacity to undertake the level of planning required locally
  - reiterate state-wide benefit – model can be used by other regions when work is complete
  - reiterate workforce plan recommendation came from DWQMP auditor – also has support from DRDMW, QLD Health and DESBT
- Proposed structure and approach to progress the regional workforce plan was discussed:
  - initial concept / framework developed to clarify what workforce planning aims to achieve
  - framework broken into Parts A-E to clarify deliverables and ensure project can be delivered in stages through grant funding if needed
- General discussion:
  - Core problem is finding the right people on the ground. Example from MSC – 2 traineeship positions advertised, only 2 people applied. DSC unable to find qualified people.
  - Traineeships and apprenticeships – councils often not able to offer permanent position. Difficult to build a business case to keep them onboard. When training is completed staff move on.
  - There is a knowledge gap on where they go to next. Renumeration down south can often be higher. Also competing with other sectors (e.g. mines – jump in wages from \$70K to \$150K). Councils are more of a lifestyle choice employer, not a monetary choice.
  - Elected officials have an expectation that trainees will complete their initial term and then leave – fundamental role of councils in providing entry-level jobs.
  - Missing link is the education piece through schools around career path in water sector. Applicants interested in applying don't know how to get started. School-based opportunities to be explored.
- Feedback on the draft framework:
  - Research question discussion:
    - Remove the word 'grow' – more about meeting the demands
    - Add language around competing against other sectors
    - Capture retention through clear development pathway
  - Desired outcomes
    - Benchmarking – what is a reasonably employed number of employees for a certain type of system? Can't be a one size fits all, must be fit for purpose regarding system being looked after. Goes to challenge of comparing one council against another council due to different infrastructure.
    - Raising awareness of the risky environment in which the councils operate is key. Need to demonstrate why regulations increase the risk to service delivery and why the personnel are so critical.
    - Raising awareness of what the industry does – not sold well to school-age students.

**Action 30.4:** W Hughes to update the *Concept for water sector workforce plan* discussion paper to capture the revised research question, desired outcomes and workforce of interest definitions then circulate with the minutes.

## 7. Regional Procurement

- CCRC has undertaken projects of interest in-house, so has CRC. MSC has had contractors doing sewer main fogging.
- MSC went out through VendorPanel for water main scouring and didn't get a response. Has secured a local contractor to deliver fire hydrant servicing.
- Cost of hiring consultants would be prohibitive for CSC, however outsourcing would make the option more reliable for TRC.

- Consensus is that demand has dropped-off – fire hydrant servicing and maintenance, water main air scouring and flushing maintenance and sewer main fogging maintenance are no longer regional procurement projects of interest. Individual councils to action as required.
- Biosolids update:
  - Councils are facing a significant price increase – details and implications to be reviewed by the procurement tender subcommittee. Decision on how to progress will be made soon.
  - M Hamill noted biosolids processing trial at Loganholme Wastewater Treatment Plant performed well. An EOI is out for potential buyers of commercial quantities of biochar. The outcome of the tender process is expected by mid-2022.

## 8. Lessons Learned

NIL

## 9. General Business

- qldwater to investigate opportunities for a Cert III training hub in FNQ to run alongside the existing Mackay training hub.
- Cert IV training EOIs open now – DSC has 4-5 people potentially interested, CRC may have 1. Councils to liaise with L&D Project Coordinator Lee-Anne Willis to formalise EOIs.

**Action 30.5:** R Cosgrove to investigate opportunities for a Cert III training hub in FNQ to run alongside the existing Mackay training hub and report back to the Alliance at the meeting in May.

## 10. Points for Noting to the FNQROC Board

NIL

## 11. Next Meeting

Friday 13 May in Cairns

## 12. Meeting Close

Closed 11.52am

**Actions as at end of Meeting No. 30:**

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