



FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND REGIONAL WATER ALLIANCE

Minutes

Meeting No	28
Meeting Name	FNQ Regional Water Alliance
Date	24 September 2021
Time	10:00 am
Venue	Committee Room – Level 3 – Cairns Regional Council

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Toni Veronese	Cairns Regional Council
David Pollak	Cairns Regional Council
Andrew Healy	Croydon Shire Council (via phone)
Peter White	Douglas Shire Council
Jon Turner	Tablelands Regional Council
Sam Bann	Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council
Ryan Cosgrove	qldwater
Carlie Sargent	qldwater (via video)
Shannon Dempster	DRDMW – Manager Water Services
Amy Barlow	QLD Health – Team Leader Environmental Health
Wendy Hughes yes	FNQROC

Apologies

Name	Organisation
Shane Butler	Etheridge Shire Council
Gene Brooks	Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council
Rohan Geddes	Mareeba Shire Council
Peter Martin	Hinchinbrook Shire Council
Morris Hamill	Mareeba Shire Council
Robyn Maddalena	Cook Shire Council
Manu Gravatt	Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Shane Bandiera	Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Victor Mills	Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council (via video)
Darlene Irvine	FNQROC

1. Welcome and apologies

Meeting opened 10.00am. W Hughes welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Confirmation of previous minutes

Minutes noted and accepted.

3. Business arising

Item	Action	Responsible
Action 27.1:	W Hughes to source the asset management 'useful life' research conducted previously by the water alliance and circulate with the minutes. Alliance members are to review and be ready to discuss at the meeting on Friday 24 September as a potential project to be re-visited.	W Hughes
Item Update: Circulated with the minutes. Added to agenda for discussion. Refer item 6.		
Action 27.2:	All water alliance members are to collate and review their council's operational maintenance schedules to understand what's currently in place and to identify potential gaps. Be ready to discuss at the meeting on Friday 24 September. The aim is to map current baseline standards to identify the need for developing regional operational maintenance standards.	All
Item Update: Added to agenda for discussion. Refer item 7.		
Action 27.3:	W Hughes to add a new standing agenda item to future meetings for lessons learned – all water alliance members to share any lessons learned on shutdowns, regulatory issues etc between meetings.	W Hughes/ All
Item Update: Complete. Refer item 10 on agenda.		
Action 27.4:	W Hughes to invite representatives from DRDMW and QLD Health to attend the meeting on Friday 24 September with a view to bi-annual attendance to increase communication and engagement opportunities with the regulators.	W Hughes
Item Update: Complete. Refer item 4 on agenda.		
Action 27.5:	W Hughes to review options to develop a regional skills and networking program that's built around gaps identified through a regional skills training matrix.	W Hughes
Item Update: In Progress. Added to agenda for discussion. Refer item 8.		
Action 27.6:	D Middleton to share hypochlorite tendering specifications used by Seqwater to aid in future contract reviews by FNQROC procurement.	D Middleton
Item Update: Complete. Circulated via email Tuesday 24 August.		

Action 27.7:	A Hancock to circulate QWRAP application to alliance members as a flying minute for formal approval before submission to qldwater for funding consideration.	A Hancock
Item Update: Complete. Application submitted to QWRAP Friday 6 August.		
Action 27.8:	W Hughes to seek levels of interest from alliance member Councils in participating in potential regional procurement programs for hydrants servicing and valve maintenance, water main air scouring and flushing maintenance, and sewer main fogging maintenance.	W Hughes
Item Update: In Progress. Only 2 Councils have expressed interest to date. Refer item 9.		

Actions from minutes were noted and accepted.

4. Regulatory / Policy Updates

Update from Shannon Dempster, Manager of Water Planning, North Region, Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water (DRDMW)

- A change in machinery of government has seen the water division join regional development and manufacturing. Based on understanding that water resources support manufacturing, which is increasing in demand. Aim is getting in early with water projects to support industry growth.
- \$9m package in place for regional water assessments. Tablelands region assessment expected to commence later this year. Covers portion of Cairns Council plus Mareeba and Tablelands only at this stage. Will be a deep dive process of surface and groundwater opportunities, likely to take between 18-24 months. Infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects will be considered. Recommendations will go to Government.
- Currently reviewing the Barron Water plan. Opportunity to revisit the legislative framework for the catchment. Engaging with Cairns, Tablelands and Mareeba Shires around need. Preliminary statement out now, expect to have draft plan for preview around Feb/Mar 2022. Plan to be finalised by Dec 2022.
- \$70m Building Our Regions program for regional water infrastructure projects. Expressions of interest close 23 November. Public health risk a key consideration for projects. Water quality and water security also key criteria. Encouraging forward planning to ensure communities don't run out of water. Climate resilience a factor. DRDMW can provide letters of support for grant submissions on request.
- Key consideration for all funding submission – is it in your DWQMP? If yes, you can build a strong case for funding support.
- Concern raised by the group around potential timing of decisions in context of council budget timeframes. Feedback to be taken back to relevant DRDMW contact.

Update from Amy Barlow, Team Leader, Tropical Health Unit Environmental Health Services, QLD Health

- Joint meeting with regulator held recently, lessons to be learnt around Sunshine Coast case of deliberate contamination. Seeking a copy of presentation to share with Councils.
- Department has recently responded to reported incidents in local area. Looking for high level of information when investigating. Skills of treatment plant operators and councils are considered when assessing incident responses.

- Review of requirements to lift boil water alerts underway. Notification will be circulated when review has been completed.
- Discussion held around private contractors and consultants selling inappropriate advice to Councils. Being investigated as misleading advice and inappropriate products bring liability which is often borne by Councils. Be open with others when dishonest operators are identified. Sharing knowledge will help stamp it out.
- More frequent communications now occurring with the regulator on 3-way conference calls for investigations.
- Currently developing specific plans for Yarrabah and 2 x TSIRC islands.
- Currently recruiting for a Senior Environmental Officer, Water.
- Potentially 2x chlorine and gas training positions available (mid-October training at Mossman Sewerage plant). Alliance members are advised to check with A Barlow if interested. Trility are the providers delivering the process.

5. FNQROC Board Information Request

A list of current and future water asset projects has been requested by the FNQROC Board to assist with regional advocacy messaging. Aim is to capture significant investments only, for example additional water supply, water storage, or significant upgrades to existing storage. The value of each project is also requested.

- CSC has a number of pump station upgrades and renewals planned – approx. 70 to be done. Also have reservoir upgrades and a significant water security project. Cairns water strategy contains more details.
- YASC needs additional water storage. Requirements and estimated value to be confirmed.
- TRC requires \$40m for projects over the next 5 years. For example, extension to water service, new water storage. Town planners are looking at it now.

Action 28.1: Alliance members are asked to review the current water strategies for their Council and provide details of any significant water asset projects (project name, asset type, value and anticipated timeframe) to inform the FNQROC Board's regional water advocacy messaging.

6. 'Useful life' asset management research

Discussion was held regarding the asset management research conducted previously by FNQROC to determine if the project should be revisited. The tool was collated using data from individual Council's and aimed to provide a standardised approach to asset valuations and depreciation.

- R Cosgrove advised the RAPAD region are current reviewing useful life asset calculations. Could potentially get some QWRAP funding to look at asset management transition if needed. TechOne as software of choice for many Councils.
- Asset criticality tool – R Cosgrove reminded that this resource is available. Aids in providing a standardised approach instead of gut feel at Council level. Framework designed for single asset at a time, next stage will be bulk import. Mackay, Whitsunday, Fraser Coast participated in the project. Lead time for critical spares was considered when establishing the tool.
- R Cosgrove to recirculate the criticality tool resource. Councils to review and submit requests for edits as there is funding available for ongoing reviews.
- J Turner advised that TRC follows the IPWEAQ asset management process.
- Asset useful life timeframes are unlikely to have changed so value in revisiting as a regional project is questionable. Not considered a priority at this stage.

Action 28.2: W Hughes to circulate the qldwater *Asset Criticality Tool* with the minutes. Alliance members to test and provide feedback to R Cosgrove for consideration as part of future tool updates.

7. Regional operational maintenance standards

Outcomes of individual Council gap analysis. Is there value in prioritising as a regional project?

- Scheduling of work is a challenge for planned maintenance packages. Finding the right contractor is the biggest issue for councils.
- TRC have been requested to ramp up maintenance activity for fire hydrants.
- CRC now include fire hydrant maintenance in all jobs to increase maintenance schedule.
- Smart watering meters being looked at by CRC but are on hold until next year.
- TRC looking to develop a business case for smart metering. R Cosgrove noted uptake across the state has been relatively slow but smaller communities that want to be known as 'smart' towns are starting to adopt.
- Remain on the list as a potential regional project but not considered a priority at this stage.

8. Regional skills and networking program

Update from Carlie Sargent, Skills Manager, qldwater

- Water skills shortage has recently been recognised by CEO of Jobs QLD. Discussions have led to an opportunity to pitch for operational resources to assist in developing a regional workforce plan for FNQ.
- Jobs QLD's core focus is now on regional development. Working with existing regional groups is preferred which places FNQROC in a strong position to secure a project. In principle support received, now needs a formal application.
- Pitch will be for a regional project that can be shared with other regions by qldwater to build resilience into workforce planning models. Opportunity to build a water industry case study.
- Formal proposal to Jobs QLD now in progress.
- Key questions to be considered: What's the workforce look like now? What are the skill gaps?

Discussion – what needs to be considered in a workforce plan for FNQROC Councils?

- A minimum 2-year training timeframe is required for Cert III traineeships. 12 months isn't enough. Can't get Cert III operators to apply for positions right now. Haven't yet promoted in the region as a pathway to employment through the school system.
- Development options for school-based traineeships to be explored. Issues with ageing workforce increasing risk. Review of traineeship model is needed.
- Jobs QLD can help look at where the aging workforce is. Local DESBIT office can potentially help with school-based traineeships. How do we offer guaranteed pathway for trainees who complete their 2 years? Potential to work-up some options around this with case study project.
- Transition to retirement piece is needed. Any plans to upskill newer staff members need to be supported by teaching current operators how to transition while keeping them engaged and not feeling redundant too early. Formalising transition to retirement tools is key.
- Review of FTE allocations and benchmarking data would be welcome. For example, evidence to support trainee position 1-2 days per week to facilitate leave for experienced operators.

- S Dempster advised DRDMW have been investigating regulator response around operational competency to help drive funding opportunities and need. May be able to assist with evidence to support benchmarking.
- Any plan must consider older retiring staff versus new technology from newer recruits – currently a source of conflict in the workforce. For example, drones, AI, new requirements for water monitoring. Training needs might be different in terms of how we manage the business going forward. Experienced operators are mentoring while also learning new technologies from the newer employees.
- A Barlow identified emerging issues from health perspective – lack of upskilling in water quality, lack of training on water treatment plants that are different to the one they're employed to work on. Currently involved in a skills audit for Wujal Wujal. Identifying missing pieces in terms of water quality – what's missing and why important. May be able to provide data to assist with case study. Application in with DESBIT now for subsidised funding.
- Skills matrix, workforce plan, gap analysis, subsidised training option. Key pillars to consider at this point.
- Remuneration to be considered – attraction and retention is a significant challenge. Secondments internally and/or across Councils are a challenge as payrates are non-competitive. Levels of decisions made on-site have major regulatory implications, this is not recognised through remuneration levels. Jobs QLD argument may assist with boosting internal business cases for increased pay rates. C Sargent advised qldwater can share discussion paper on this on request.
- Increased risks associated with climate change need to be factored into the workforce plan. Workers will be more exposed to natural disasters such as floods, extreme weather events – workers also have hour restrictions imposed for safety reasons on shifts worked, major concern with redundancy in the system.
- Workforce plan should consider education of other council staff and Councillors around risks specific to the water sector.

Additional discussion around regional skills development

- Support officer in DESBIT may still be an option if Jobs QLD project doesn't go ahead for a review of school-based opportunities.
- Water careers website upgrade underway. Sample demonstrated. Interview candidates would be welcome. Water treatment, network maintenance and repairs, professional roles (engineers etc) – any candidates welcome for future additions.
- QLD Health have some 'how to' videos available now. Operator training availability in the area remains an issue. QLD Health RTO may be able to deliver Cert III training in the future.
- Water operators are viewed as an 'essential worker' by QLD Health for purposes of COVID – can this profile be elevated internally to create more awareness of the sector? Reminder to obtain specialist worker exemptions during COVID.
- Opportunity exists to flip the perception internally and externally around water operators being essential workers. Not currently perceived in that regard.
- D-D-G's at QLD Health have reviewed Doherty Institute modelling for COVID. Anyone that sits on an local disaster management group (LDMG) will now have to be vaccinated. Implications for Councils if water operators do come down with COVID need to be elevated and considered. QLD Health can help with planning if needed and can send written verification of essential worker status to councils who need it. Also an opportunity under disaster management to gain COVID approvals through QLD Health.
- Decision made to focus on workforce plan opportunity before initiating a regional skills audit as a standalone project.

Action 28.3: W Hughes to work with C Sargent on a submission to Jobs QLD seeking operational resources to support the development of a water industry case study for FNQROC Water Alliance member Councils.

9. Regional procurement

Expressions of interest were sought for:

- Fire Hydrant Servicing and Maintenance, including cleaning out hydrants with a Vac Truck, servicing hydrants and/or replacing them
- Water main air scouring and flushing maintenance program
- Sewer main fogging maintenance program

Tablelands, Yarrabah, Douglas, Croydon and Mareeba Shire Councils are interested in exploring the programs as regional procurement projects.

Action 28.4: W Hughes to initiate discussions with FNQROC Procurement on the proposed regional procurement contracts for fire hydrant servicing and maintenance, water main air scouring and flushing maintenance, and sewer main fogging maintenance programs then update interested Councils at the meeting in November.

10. Lessons Learned

- Reminder to closely inspect new assets before taking ownership and to build this into standard operating procedures. An experience was shared of trailers purchased recently not being completed to standard.
- Building requests outside of planning schemes and codes are increasing in some areas. Pressure is coming from building sector through to Councillors. Councillor education around land use planning legislation may be required.

Action 28.5: W Hughes to explore training opportunities that may assist Councils with Councillor education around land use planning legislation and its impact. [Note: The LGAQ [Understanding Land Use Planning for Elected Members](#) course may be of interest].

11. General business

Update from Ryan Cosgrove, Project Coordinator/Researcher, qldwater

qldwater Annual Forum was held in September. Highlights from the forum were discussed.

- Automated metering
 - Workshop outcomes will be developed into a paper. Videos available [online now](#) (member access only).
 - Southern Downs had been forced into adoption, interesting outcomes were shared.
 - TSIRC case presented – achieved significant reduction in boil water notices and saw big benefits around leak detection etc.
 - Climate Beacon – Griffith University looking into this now.
- Education and skills development
 - Environmental issues such as emerging contaminants, asset management and the role of finance in establishing depreciation rules.

- Stratford Island famil – CrossRiver Rail presentation on BIM model, appears to be the future for asset management in their view. Prediction modelling of potential issues.
- UQ presented about the hydrogen situation for STP's, lots of caveats around it.

General Updates

- LGAQ Annual conference taking place in October. QWRAP will be represented by Subathra Ramachandram from LGAQ.
- DES has pre-empted amendments to legislation around changes to environmental agreements. qldwater to review and potentially host some information sessions.
- H2S standards and guidelines were developed without consultation with water utilities. Group working to push back on this at present. Dave, Louise and Rob are working on this to raise visibility. Major implications for ongoing operating costs.
- High pressure water jetting exemptions, working on this at present.

12. Next Meeting Dates

- Friday 19 November

13. Meeting Close

12.30pm

Actions as at end of Meeting No. 28:

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