

FNQ Regional Water Alliance

Minutes

Meeting No	41
Meeting Name	FNQ Regional Water Alliance
Date	7 March 2025
Time	9:30am
Venue	Committee Room, Level 3, Cairns Regional Council, Spence Street, Cairns

1. ATTENDANCE

Name	Organisation
Josh Smith	Cairns Regional Council
Shane Bandeira	Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Simon Page	Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Kerryn Bull	Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Robyn Maddalena	Cook Shire Council
Peter White	Douglas Shire Council
Aditya Mishra	Mareeba Shire Council
Morris Hamill	Mareeba Shire Council
Charles Dyer <i>via teleconference</i>	Tablelands Regional Council
Sam Bann <i>via teleconference</i>	Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council
Christopher Land <i>via teleconference</i>	Queensland Health
David Wiskar <i>via teleconference</i>	Queensland Water
Lee-Anne Willis <i>via teleconference</i>	Water Industry Worker
Amanda Hancock	FNQROC

2. APOLOGIES

Name	Organisation
Adam Schmalz	Cairns Regional Council
Mark Wuth	Cairns Regional Council
Toni Veronese	Cairns Regional Council
Natasha Glaskin	Cairns Regional Council
Jacquie Creswell	Croydon Shire Council
Ben Baillie	Douglas Shire Council
Raju Ranjit	Etheridge Shire Council
Daniel Gatto	Hinchinbrook Shire Council

Mark Lawson	Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council
Mark Vis	Tablelands Regional Council
Kiley Hounslow	Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council
Gary Fenwick	LGAQ
Ted Aldred	RDMW
Ingrid Formiatti Minnesma	RDMW
Brett Rip	RDMW
Brad Milligan	QLD Health

3. CONFIRMATION OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

Minutes noted and accepted.

4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Action Item	Action	Responsible Person(s)	Status
38.2	Cairns Regional Council to share dewatering options assessment outcomes from Northern Dewatering Upgrade Project.	Cairns Regional Council	Complete – not available for release
38.5	All councils to provide FNQROC with an updated list of their Planned Regional Water & Sewer Infrastructure Upgrades. Councils may also choose to include other projects that they are aware of that may not currently be formally planned or funded.	Received from CRC, CSC, MSC & TRC to date	Received from CRC, CSC, MSC & TRC to date
39.1	FNQROC to develop a Scope for a biosolids dewatering and wet weather storage study and circulate to the Water Alliance for approval	FNQROC	Complete
39.3	FNQROC to investigate potential for a Regional Trade Waste Environmental Management Plan arrangement.	FNQROC	Outstanding

Amanda advised that QLD Water are currently preparing a QWRAP bid pool submission to support a Trade Waste Uplift project for regional communities, following requests from several councils including Livingstone Shire Council. The collaborative project would comprise of three main deliverables:

1. Developing a **model regional trade waste management plan**
2. Developing a **spreadsheet calculator** to support the WSAA Trade Waste Guidelines Values addendum to the Australian Sewage Quality Management Guidelines, along with a model trade waste loading report.
3. Establish and fund a regional **Queensland Trade Waste Interest Group (TWIG)** to drive ongoing improvements.

Participation from councils from other alliances interested in trade waste management improvements is encouraged, so our interest has been registered with QLD Water. If the bid pool submission is successful, the first meeting will take place to establish the TWIG PM Thursday 20 March 2025 followed by Trade Waste Workshops on Friday March 2025.

40.1	David Wiskar to circulate details of Electro Chlorination in Mt Isa.	David Wiskar, QLD Water	Complete
40.2	Each council to nominate a suitable representative to the Regional Leak Detection Sub-Committee. Ieva Pradal to facilitate the committee and progress the Regional Leak Detection Joint Procurement arrangements.	All Councils & FNQROC	Received from CCRC, CSC, Croydon SC and MSC to date

Amanda advised that:

- Applications for Regional Water Leak Detection Project through the Regional Drought Resilience Plan Scheme were originally submitted on December 12th 2024 through QRIDA.
- Following a slight delay associated with the eligibility and approvals process, we have now received eligibility and approval to proceed with grant application.
- Applications are required by 14 March and the project still needs to be completed by November 2025.
- Need councils to nominate representatives to the sub-committee asap. TRC nominated Mark Lorenzi. Nominations outstanding from HSC, HVASC, and WWASC.

Updates will be provided as and when they are received.

Charles, TRC advised that they had recently agreed to receive a visit and a demonstration from a firm who use dogs to provide leak detection services, Charles will share the learnings with the group.

ACTION POINT 41.1 Charles, TRC to share learnings of upcoming visit from dog leak detection service.

40.3	FNQROC to set up a meeting to discuss ongoing sewer relining arrangements and any required changes to current Scope to mitigate legacy issues recently identified.	FNQROC	Complete - Arranged for 27 March 2025
40.4	FNQROC to commence development of procurement documentation for the next Regional Beneficial Reuse of Biosolids arrangement as the current contract with Arkwood will expire on 30 September 2025.	FNQROC	Outstanding See Item 7
40.5	David Wiskar to share copy of Sunwater's pricing policy.	David Wiskar, QLD Water	Complete
40.6	David Wiskar to provide details of Micro Credential training and how the training might be facilitated in the region as opposed to in Brisbane. FNQROC to establish interest from councils and Lee-Anne Willis to assist with facilitation.	David Wiskar, QLD Water, FNQROC & Lee-Anne Willis, WIW	Complete

Unfortunately, despite plenty of initial interest in micro-credential training, insufficient numbers were nominated to justify running Cairns based sessions. Some councils advised that this was due to budget constraints, and it was agreed that if the training could take place early in the next financial year, councils would probably be able to commit more attendees.

ACTION POINT 41.2 Amanda to re-circulate details of micro-credential training and seek nominations for Cairns based training to take place in September 2025.

5. REGIONAL WATER CAPABILITY PLAN, IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING – ALL

The FNQROC, with support from the Dept of Local Government and Water and Jobs Queensland, developed the Regional Water Capability Plan which was endorsed by the FNQROC Board on 5 December 2024. It provides a list of scalable and achievable short, medium and long-term strategic initiatives and actions that enable councils to address capability challenges in the delivery of service and deliver transformative outcomes for FNQROC.

The 11 strategic initiatives are as follows.

1. Establish common operating systems, platforms and tools - standardising processes to improve efficiency
2. Regional water data sharing - facilitating collaboration through shared data resources
3. Standardised SOPs, work instructions, templates and processes - creating uniformity in operation
4. Standardised water and wastewater asset and design and specification - ensuring consistency in infrastructure development.
5. Strategic awareness of water and wastewater service delivery - enhancing understanding of service delivery dynamics
6. Prudent and efficient water and wastewater services in FNQ - promoting sustainable practices
7. Establishing regional market buying power for FNQ - leveraging collective purchasing to reduce costs
8. Driving change in water and wastewater grant funding - advocating for improved funding mechanisms
9. Building capability in risk-based decision making across FNQ - enhanced decision-making frameworks
10. Building maturity in asset management and planning across FNQ - strengthening asset management practices
11. Building and sustaining a strong water workforce for FNQ - fostering workforce development and retention

To guide implementation, as part of the Plan, each strategic initiative was prioritised by evaluating the business value and the complexity of efforts required to achieve the outcomes.

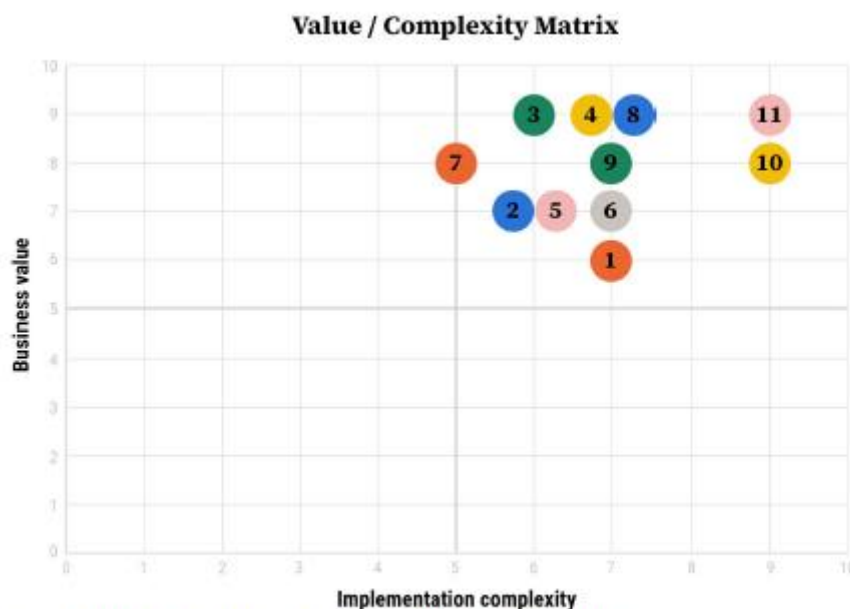







Figure 6-2: Business Value and Implementation Complexity Mapping

For example, according to this process, Initiative 3 – Standardise SOPs, work instructions, templates and processes, is the highest business value with the lowest implementation complexity.

Individual actions have also been identified against each of the initiatives, and consideration given within the Plan to the delivery and implementation of outcome from a capability and capacity perspective. Some actions have been identified as being wholly within the control of the Water Alliance, others will need additional or specialist capability or capacity from the market or government to enable delivery.

 Can be achieved within FNQ	 Can be achieved within FNQ but requires State Policy change or input.	 Can be achieved within FNQ but requires State funding support.
 Can be achieved with FNQ but requires assistance from specialist Subject-Matter Experts (SMEs).	 Fully reliant on external market and/or government input.	

And finally, the Plan sets out indicative timeframes to deliver the actions however these timeframes did not consider council or regional resourcing, financial or capacity considerations as part of its development.

Each of the initiatives were discussed by the Water Alliance and consideration given to the business value and implementation complexity to determine which initiatives and actions to progress first.

Initiative 1 – Establish common operating systems, platforms and tools.

Comments

- Some parts of this initiative will be difficult to achieve but focusing for example of SCADA and network telemetry in the first instance could be of benefit.
- Option with the lowest business value but mid-level complexity

Initiative 2 – Regional water data sharing

Comments

- This shouldn't be too difficult to achieve. Need to decide on what data we need regionally.
- SWIMS platform already available. Could perhaps arrange for David Sheltinga, QLD Water to run a workshop?
- Need to look at automation wherever possible
- Similar to the Urban Water Explorer?
- Option is at the lower end of business value but also low-level complexity

Initiative 3 – Standardised SOPS, work instructions, templates and processes.

Comments

- All very keen to progress this initiative – 'quick win'
- Audits currently focusing on SOPs
- Option is high in terms of business value and relatively low-level complexity and all capable of being achieved within FNQ

Initiative 4 – Standardised water and wastewater asset design and specification

Comments

- Potentially some work already underway in CRC
- Extension of what is currently in the FNQROC Development Manual.
- Focus on capital projects/refurbishments etc rather than just new development which is currently well covered.
- SCADA, electrical specifications etc
- Option is high in terms of business value and mid-level complexity and all capable of being delivered within FNQ with assistance from SMEs.

Initiative 5 - Strategic awareness of water and wastewater service delivery

Comments

- This is about improving internal awareness and understanding of water and wastewater operations to assist with prioritising investment both internally and when advocating for external funding
- South West Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (SWQROC) recently developed a Water and Sewerage Infrastructure Strategy (Asset Criticality Assessment) which they are using to advocate for funding.
- The first step of this process was an asset condition assessment which was a substantial body of work.
- Option is lower end of business value but also relatively low-level complexity

ACTION POINT 41.3 David Wiskar, QLD Water to share information regarding the SWQROC Sewerage Infrastructure Strategy.

Initiative 6 – Prudent and efficient water and wastewater services in FNQ

Comments

- Determination of financial viability of water and wastewater service delivery
- Current approach is too focused on CAPEX with TOTEX (total expenditure) lacking focus resulting in gaps in day-to-day service delivery
- NSW Productivity Commission have undertaken a relevant review
- Community service obligation approach?
- Urban Water Risk Assessment not yet released but mainly focused on drinking water risks and water security as opposed to infrastructure deficits or OPEX costs.
- Option is mid-level in terms of business value and complexity
- Aligned with initiative 5.

ACTION POINT 41.4 David Wiskar, QLD Water to share information of the NSW Productivity Commission Review into water and wastewater funding models.

Initiative 7 – Establishing regional market buying power for FNQ

Comments

- We're already doing this relatively well
- Opportunity to maybe extend our reach into goods as opposed to just services.
- Potential to look at longer term partnership arrangements for capital delivery in the same way as some of the larger utilities have done.
- Cairns Townsville Mackay (CTM) Alliance possibly utilised for Cairns's capital works.
- Option is lowest in terms of implementation complexity but also business value

Initiative 8 – Driving change in water and wastewater grant funding

Comments

- Focus on advocating for re-design and restructure of the way in which grant funding is delivered beyond 1 year
- Revised model to focus on TOTEX as opposed to just CAPEX.
- Initiative is high in terms of business value and relatively mid-level complexity
- Closely aligned with Initiatives 5 and 6.

Initiative 9 – Building capability in risk-based decision making across FNQ

Comments

- Of some use, councils do already have organisation wide risk management frameworks just not water specific.
- Option is considered mid to high business value and complexity

Initiative 10 – Building maturity in asset management and planning across FNQ

Comments

- High complexity but relatively high business value
- Could initially begin by gathering information regarding council's current asset management systems and processes.

Initiative 11 – Building and sustaining a strong water workforce for FNQ

Comments

- This was initially the focus of the water capability plan so high priority
- QLD Water have recently developed an HR/IR toolkit
- Could start by reviewing existing PDs against model documents
- Look to form a sub-committee made up of council HR (and potentially L&D) reps to progress actions
- L&D village exchange a helpful initiative set up by LGAQ
- Jobs Queensland also keen to assist with collateral

Following discussion, it was agreed that the initiatives with the highest business value would be the first to be progressed as follows:

- Initiative 3 – Standardised SOPS, work instructions, templates and processes.
- Initiative 4 – Standardised water and wastewater asset design and specification
- Initiative 8 – Driving change in water and wastewater grant funding
- Initiative 11 – Building and sustaining a strong water workforce for FNQ

It was also noted that Initiative 8 is closely aligned with initiatives 5 and 6 as follows:

- Initiative 5 – Strategic awareness of water and wastewater service delivery
- Initiative 6 – Prudent and efficient water and wastewater services in FNQ

ACTION POINT 41.5 Amanda to advise the Water Alliance separately of individual actions required to progress each of the Water Capability Plan agreed priority initiatives for implementation.

6. REGIONAL JOINT PURCHASING – AMANDA HANCOCK, FNQROC

6.1 Regional Leak Detection Arrangement

See Item 4, Actions from Previous Minutes, Item 40.2

6.2 Drinking Water Quality Management Plan Audits

Following a regional RFQ, Dan Deere from Water Futures recently appointed to conduct audits on behalf of all councils except for Hinchinbrook Shire Council and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council. Audits underway and will be completed by the EOFY.

6.3 Regional Sewer Relining

- 24/25 arrangement is currently underway. Cassowary Coast Regional Council almost complete. Crew is currently at Cairns Regional Council undertaking sewer relining and will then move to Cook Shire Council for manhole rehabilitation. Regional program to be completed by EOFY.
- Councils requested to provide their programs for 25/26 as soon as possible. Meeting taking place at the end of the month to discuss future arrangements.

6.4 Regional Supply & Delivery of Water Chemicals

- Coogee – Sodium Hypo
 - Discussion regarding contract departures ongoing but nearing conclusion.
 - Once finalised contracts to be circulated for councils and Coogee to sign.
- Cleveland Bay Chemicals
 - Contract meeting took place on 5 March 2025.
 - Update regarding supplier operations and general operating conditions provided
 - No issues of concern raised regarding the contract

Morris Hamill left the meeting at 12.50pm

7. REGIONAL BIOSOLIDS – DEWATERING/WET WEATHER STUDY – AMANDA HANCOCK, FNQROC

Amanda advised:

- At the end of 2023 a Regional Biosolids Sub-committee was set up to focus on the development of a biosolids strategy. A Terms of Reference was developed, and a summary report produced detailing the available disposal options and benefits and risks associated with the management of biosolids disposal.
- A copy of the Terms of Reference and summary report was circulated by email on 6 January 2025 and again on 28 February 2025.
- It is fair to say that not too much has changed since then except a further potential of tightening of regulations and even more uncertainty regarding disposal options.
- Whilst we had initially planned to explore thermal treatment options this was put on the back burner given the lack of regulatory uncertainty (EOW Code for Biochar, PFAS limits etc etc). However, two actions arose from the Water Alliance meetings last year in relation to biosolids.
- These actions were as follows:
 - Action Item 39.1 FNQROC to develop a Scope for a biosolids dewatering and wet weather storage study and circulate to the Water Alliance for approval
 - Action Item 40.4 FNQROC to commence development of procurement documentation for the next Regional Beneficial Reuse of Biosolids arrangement as the current contract with Arkwood will expire on 30 September 2025.
- In relation to Action Item 39.1, FNQROC has been working with John Bishop, Water Process Services on the development of an RFQ for a Regional Biosolids Dewatering Options Analysis. This analysis is intended to assist councils by identifying the most cost effective and sustainable way to minimise costs associated with dewatering of biosolids at council sites. Options to minimise cost may include those directly related to the operation of the dewatering processes but also the transportation and disposal costs associated with the final moisture content of the dewatered biosolids.
- The wet weather storage element has not been included in this study as it was decided instead to include this with the Action Item 40.4 which we will get underway when the RFQ has been approved and released.

- A copy of the draft RFQ was also circulated on 6 January 2025 and again on 28 February 2025 for consideration and once agreed we plan to send it out via the Local Buy Engineering & Consultancy Services ROPS.
- It was also recommended that the Regional Biosolids Sub-committee be reconvened to focus on the development of an EOI for collection, disposal, and potential wet weather storage of biosolid given the expiration of the current contract is fast approaching.

David Wiskar advised that Queensland Urban Utilities have previously undertaken a similar Biosolids Dewatering Options Analysis which he thinks may be of benefit to the region. It was therefore agreed to establish if Urban Utilities would be prepared to share the findings of their study before releasing the RFQ.

ACTION POINT 41.6 David Wiskar, QLD Water to liaise with Queensland Urban Utilities regarding release of their Biosolids Dewatering study. Thereafter further consideration to be given to releasing the RFQ for a Regional Biosolids Dewatering Options Analysis.

It was agreed that the Regional Biosolids Sub-committee did not need to be reconvened until there was a specific project to progress. FNQROC to focus on firming up ongoing contract arrangements and the development of an EOI.

8. QWRAP & QLD WATER UPDATE – DAVID WISKAR, QLD WATER

David Wiskar, Qld Water provided an update.

Copy of David Wiskar's update presentation circulated with the minutes together with various other supporting documents.

Christopher Land left the meeting at 12.15pm

9. QUEENSLAND HEALTH – BRAD MILLIGAN, QLD HEALTH

Brad Milligan provided an update to be circulated by email following the meeting as he had to leave before providing an update.

Sam Bann left the meeting at 12.30pm

10. GENERAL BUSINESS

- Cassowary Coast Regional Council advised they are working with Lee-Anne Willis to develop BNR (Biological Nutrient Removal) training suited to operators only, like what used to be available in the Cert 2.
- Lee-Anne advised WIM Alliance have also requested something similar
- SCADA micro credential training taking place in Brisbane in April for those that may not wish to wait until potential Cairns based training in September
- Cert 3 training also taking place – 18 March – Douglas Shire Council, 24 March – Cassowary Coast Regional Council

11. UPCOMING EVENTS

- Qld Water Annual Water Skills Forum – 26/27 March 2025, Parliament House, Brisbane
- Drinking Water Regulation Workshop – 1 April 2025, Cairns Regional Council

- Various Micro-Credential courses – April 2025, Eagle Farm, Brisbane
- Water Connections Tour – 12-15 May
- QLD Water Annual Forum - 20/21 August, Eagle Farm, Brisbane

12. NEXT MEETING

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 1pm

Minutes prepared by Amanda Hancock, Regional Strategic Infrastructure Coordinator

AGREED ACTION ITEMS

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41.2	Amanda to re-circulate details of micro-credential training and seek nominations for Cairns based training to take place in September 2025.	Amanda Hancock, FNQROC
41.3	David Wiskar, QLD Water to share information regarding the SWQROC Sewerage Infrastructure Strategy.	David Wiskar, QLD Water
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41.5	Amanda to advise the Water Alliance separately of actions required to progress each of the Water Capability Plan agreed priority initiatives for implementation.	Amanda Hancock, FNQROC
41.6	David Wiskar, QLD Water to liaise with Queensland Urban Utilities regarding release of their Biosolids Dewatering study. Thereafter further consideration to be given to releasing the RFQ for a Regional Biosolids Dewatering Options Analysis.	David Wiskar, QLD Water