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Welcome to the first issue of WICD E-News for 2008. There has already been quite a lot going on this year in the lead up to our first national WICD Conference on the Gold Coast at the end of the month. First let's start with an overview of the Skills Forum by AWA's National Manager, Programs, Corinne Cheeseman:

National Water Skills Forum

Earlier this month in Canberra, the National Water Skills Forum was jointly convened by the National Water Commission (NWC), Australian Water Association (AWA) and Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA). The objective was to engage with a representative group of leaders on the skills issues relating to the water industry.

Prior to the meeting Erik Olbrei (NWC), Grant Leslie (WSAA) and myself (AWA) prepared background information on what we already know. This came from a variety of sources, however much of the documented information available has become available through WICD. The purpose of the Forum was not to go over what we do know but rather to come up with a commitment to work as an industry on this issue going forward.

Ken Matthews (Chair, NWC) opened with an overview of the purpose of the forum emphasising that the meeting of senior leaders and industry stakeholders provides the opportunity to collaborate and reach agreement on critical issues and actions, and gain commitment to a strategy to address skills shortages. Ken will be speaking about the forum and skills issues more broadly in his Keynote address at the WICD Conference on Monday 31st March on the Gold Coast.

The Honourable Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change and Water, addressed the Forum and spoke primarily on the Government's commitment to relieving the nation-wide skills shortage through funding for:

- an additional 820,000 skilled training places over the next six years,
- \$5 million towards the 'Mentors for Our Students' program which recognises the important contribution recently retired professionals and tradespeople can make.

Ross Young (Executive Director, WSAA) presented the recent findings of the Skills Report (for more details see Grant Leslie's article in this issue).

The meeting then broke into smaller working groups to discuss the issues in the areas of:

1. Universities and higher education
2. Schools and vocational training
3. Attracting people to the industry
4. Retaining people in the industry

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WICD Steering Committee members:



Developing National Learning Resources in Water Operations and Water Resource Management

Prue Madsen (Government Skills Australia)

About the project

The National Water Commission has provided funding for the development of nationally consistent resources for the delivery and assessment of training for operational qualifications in the water industry.

The learning resources will reflect the knowledge and skills required to embed water standards, innovative technology and new values and practices in the water workforce, especially at operational levels of water management. Project resources will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders and reflect high standards of industry and national and international practice.

Project Management

Government Skills Australia (GSA) is one of ten industry skills councils established by the Department for Education, Science and Training to develop and manage the standards and national qualifications for its industries' workforce. The work of Government Skills Australia provides the basis for training content and compliance within the Vocational Education and Training system. The aim of Government Skills Australia is to ensure that national qualifications reflect the operational practices of industry, and that training for these qualifications meets high quality standards, ensuring that the water industry can rely on a competent workforce with the latest skills requirements in an increasingly demanding environment and circumstances.

The project will have the oversight of the Water Industry Advisory Committee of Government Skills Australia, which has representation from state water authorities, registered training organisations, state industry bodies, national peak bodies and trade unions. The members of the Industry Advisory Committee are responsible for wider consultation with their state and national interests and constituents aimed at optimum ownership and stewardship of all GSA projects and products.

Background

In developing industry standards and qualifications for training in the water industry, representatives expressed concern at the lack of consistency in the delivery of training, and therefore in its expected outcomes. There was concern that access to training was subject to the barriers of a low demand and dispersed workforce. Some areas of training had a wide range of different resources duplicated by

many different agencies, while other areas seemed to have no resources. Some water organisations and training agencies had invested in training resources but these were not available to those who worked in other water organisations with more limited resources. The development of training resources will always be more cost effective in larger authorities than in smaller.

National Water Skills Forum (cont. from front cover)

Tom Mollenkopf (Chief Executive, AWA), outlined a number of initiatives that are currently in various stages, including WICD'S H₂Oz Careers in Water branding project and Secondments project and confirmed that AWA is willing to lead and manage the industry effort going forward.

The day culminated in a national action plan as an industry wide approach to skills shortage and related issues.

The action Plan included;

1. Develop a coordinated and collaborative industry approach to address the skills issue
2. Become a 'sector of choice'
3. Engage and partner with the education sector
4. Develop clear educational pathways and products
5. Improve the water industry value proposition
6. Facilitate ease of entry into and movement within the industry

The next steps will include an Industry Skills Task Force comprising Ken Matthews, Tom Mollenkopf and Ross Young to determine a broader Industry Coordinating Body which will comprise 8-9 CEO level members representative of the water industry and the relevant parts of the education sector.

Overall the outcome was a great one for WICD. It is now likely that WICD will transition into a more action-orientated initiative that will have the required projects funded and delivered. The Forum participants gave in principle support to funding key projects on presentation of a business plan. AWA and WSAA have funded the development of a business plan for the H₂Oz Careers in Water project immediately and the other plans will follow. I'll be speaking in more detail on the way forward during the WICD Projects afternoon session at the WICD Conference on Tuesday 1st April. I hope to see you there.

Generous industry parties determined that it would be advantageous to place all future resources into a national and readily accessible pool to ensure that there will be fair and equitable access to training resources for all people working in the water industry.

Project benefits

The project will help to deliver nationally consistent learning resources and assessment standards for modern water resource management (treatment, distribution and catchment management) based on the goals of the federal government's National Water Initiative. While maintaining national standards, learning resources will be designed for ready accessibility and customisation for different contexts and locations. They will incorporate contemporary computer-based learning and interactive and problem solving techniques.

The project will increase access to high quality, nationally consistent, portable and accepted qualifications for all Australians interested in working in the water industry including people in remote and isolated communities.

Project Deliverables

The project aims to develop attractive, high quality training resources for both structured training delivery and for self directed learning and skills development. This will take the form of both interactive e-learning products and more traditional training manuals based on modularised packaging and more direct assessment. Most training needs will be met by a blend of these different resources. The project will include the development of:

- Self assessment tools to enable learners to gauge their current skills levels and to plan their training needs and activities
- Learning pathways and guides
- Assessment guides
- On-line and manual learning resources for each qualification
- Presentation material
- Trainer guides
- Templates and customisable resources

Inherent in the design will be automatic evaluation and review processes to ensure that the products continue to meet industries' needs and future changes to demand and water management culture.

Issues for the project

There are significant issues regarding industry expectations which have emerged during the project and which are not yet fully resolved. These include:

1. The challenge of catering to the different approaches taken by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), such as TAFE Institutes and

consultant trainers, and by enterprise RTOs who have an employment relationship with trainees and learners.

- Assessment, in particular is no longer readily designed to accommodate off the job training providers, who will have difficulty gaining longer term access to the learner in the workplace practices required to complete the assessment process.
- Employers are increasingly interested in training which is specific to the enterprise context and requirements, while training traditional TAFE training needs to be able to accommodate a diversity of practice requirements.

2. Designing the learning resources to cater for those who feel that the industry needs traditional hard copy resources, and those who feel that it is time to move to computer-base interactive resources, more appealing to younger recruits and more adventurous learners.

3. Recruiting the time and expertise of industry practice experts in time of staff and skills shortages and gaining agreement from industry on what constitutes best practice. The quality of the resources will depend on the contribution of industry experts in the development of content and in the review and endorsement of resources as they move through their drafting stages.

4. Determining the components which should be consistent and mandatory to reflect the national standards versus the need for customisation to adapt to operational and enterprise differences. It is an ongoing paradox that we have national standards but allow for broad customisation, and the dividing line between regulation and flexibility is continuously moving.

5. Minimising obsolescence and planning for future demands and innovation in a dramatically changing cultural, economic, social and environmental setting. This is a challenge for the design of the resources to reduce the confusion caused by constantly changing expectations, while at the same time allowing for the inclusion of new skills and technologies.

Outcomes of the Project

The project will run for two years and will deliver resources for the Certificate II in Water Operations by the end of 2008, and the Certificate III and IV by the end of 2009.

For more information contact GSA through the website www.governmentskills.com.au

Skills Project Grant Leslie (WSAA)

At the Industry Skills Forum held in Canberra on Monday the 17th of March, the Water Services Association of Australia's CEO, Ross Young, launched the report into the skills shortage titled, *An Assessment of the Skills Shortage in the Urban Water Industry*,

The report is sobering reading indeed. The data was based on the WSAA membership and therefore is relevant to the water utility sector. For the first time some real numbers have been added to the pool of knowledge that has been gathered over the past few years and seems to generally reflect the anecdotal evidence from previous reports.

Some 84% of the water utilities staff will turn over in the next 10 years according to the report. Almost 30% will retire 20% will leave the water industry all together and a further 34% will change their job within the water sector. Coupled with an expected 7.3% growth approximately 8,600 new staff will be required to fill vacancies, and 3,100 will be required by the end of 2009.

The full report is now available for download from the WSAA website.

<http://www.wsaa.asn.au/pdf/bookshop/2008/pp036.pdf?x=174&y=8>

WICD Update

The next **WICD Subscribers Committee meeting** will be held at the **Gold Coast International Conference Centre on the 2nd April, 11:30 - 12:30.**

The next **HR Network meeting** will also be held at the **Gold Coast International Conference Centre on the 2nd April, 9:00 – 11:30.**

Ross Sampson left the Water Corporation in January this year. We wish Ross all the very best and thank him for his time and commitment on WICD Steering Committee, his valuable contribution to the University Courses and National Water Industry Employment Branding projects, and for his more recent role as Chair of the WICD Subscribers Committee.

We are pleased to announce that Government Skills Australia (GSA) has joined the WICD Steering Committee. GSA will be represented by Prue Madsen, GSA's National Project Manager. Welcome Prue!

WICD MEMBERS

Barwon Water	MidCoast Water
Central Highlands Water	National Swimming Pool Inst.
Coliban Water Authority	North East Water
East Gippsland Water	NQ Water
Gippsland Water	Power and Water Corporation
East Gippland Water	Principal Consulting Group
Gold Coast Water	SA Water Corporation
Gosford City Council	South East Water
Goulburn Murray Water	SunWater
Goulburn Valley Water	Sydney Catchment Authority
Hobart Water	Sydney Water
Hunter Water Corporation	Veolia Water Australia
Logan Water	Water Corporation
Maroochy Water	Western Water
Melbourne Water	Yarra Valley Water

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If you are a provider of water-related courses for the vocational or higher education sectors,
register and advertise your courses for FREE!

www.wicd.org.au/skills.html

WICD *E-News*

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To make contributions please email
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