

# WIOA – YOUR ASSOCIATION



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## **WIOA - Your Association**

The Water Industry Operators Association of Australia (WIOA) is an organisation dedicated to servicing its members employed in the water industry and primarily performs operational, hands-on roles. WIOA members are at the coal-face; the doers; those out in the field every day; often the first people in the community on the scene after disaster has hit, ensuring that clean water is available to drink and that wastewater is not causing health issues or entering our environment. WIOA members in recent times have had to deal with catastrophic fire, drought, cyclone and flood events. WIOA understands the unique issues which people in such challenging roles face and therefore aims to bring relevant, timely and most importantly useful information to our members. WIOA is a not-for-profit organisation where all funds raised are invested back into information sharing, such as this event, production of publications and technical seminars to name a few, all at an affordable cost.

WIOA has a long history of providing excellent services to our members from our humble beginnings as just a Victorian wastewater association. We now cover operational issues across all sectors of the water and wastewater industry and in all States of Australia and overseas. This broadened focus was implemented in order to meet the changing needs of not only members, but the water industry in general. In 2009 we boasted about reaching our 1000<sup>th</sup> Member. In early 2011 we are now close to reaching another exciting milestone – our 2000<sup>th</sup> Member!

There are a number of fundamental ideals and values that have been passed down “through the ages” which influence all our activities. These include:

- keeping the cost of membership as low as possible so the annual fee is never seen as a deterrent to joining;
- keeping politics and Industrial Relations issues out of mainstream Association business;
- ensuring the Association provides value to ALL members; and
- keeping a strong focus at all times on members and their needs, and concentrating our efforts towards predominately operational issues.

### **Our Services**

One of the main goals of WIOA is to increase the level of knowledge and skills of operational staff across all segments of the water industry. We want to help operators so that they can perform their important job functions more efficiently and productively whilst protecting Public Health and the Environment. To deliver these goals and to provide opportunities for professional and personal development of our members, WIOA has developed a wide ranging and varied suite of events, publications and services.

On the event side, we offer specialised seminars and interactive workshops, major conferences which incorporate large trade exhibitions, and opportunities to visit water and wastewater facilities in both Australia and Internationally. These events are important for many reasons but the main one is to allow operational staff a forum to come together, to hear about projects and case studies, to network with people working within your same region in order to share knowledge. Our corporate members also share in these opportunities as there are few chances to reach hundreds of industry professionals all in the one location.

We are actively developing technical resources based on industry best practice outcomes and in 2011 we are committed to releasing the first books as part of the wastewater series of ‘Practical Guides’. The completed water series of ‘Practical Guide’ books have now reached second edition print for some titles due to their applicability in day-to-day water operations.

## **Operator Certification – Improve the Water Industry**

From 2008, WIOA has been the driving force behind the development of minimum standards of training and experience for operators, in conjunction with an “Operator Certification” scheme. In 2011 this will become a reality in Victoria and there is an opportunity for this to be extended nationally in the future.

WIOA has worked proactively with the Victorian Department of Health and VicWater (representing the water businesses) for over three years in the development of the “*Victorian Framework for Water Treatment Operator Competencies - Best Practice Guidelines*”. The Framework was launched at the WIOA conference in Bendigo in September 2010 and will be implemented in Victoria in early 2011.

Once implemented, for the first time in Australia we will have specified minimum training, competency and experience requirements in place, as well as a requirement to undertake refresher training to keep skills updated. Further, operators will be “Certified” under a new scheme offered by WIOA, as having the appropriate training and experience to match the types of systems they are operating.

As a result of our efforts, this issue has now also gained national importance with a project to develop a National Certification Framework under way via the National Water Commission and supported by COAG. WIOA will continue lobbying for the implementation of a similar program right across Australia, and we will also look at expanding our Certification scheme to cover wastewater and other operational disciplines throughout 2011.

## **Operator Recognition**

WIOA has also had significant input into the development and maintenance of the Water Training Package and we are a member of Government Skills Australia’s Water Industry Advisory Committee. The skills shortage has been well documented and we have tried to encourage young people into operational roles in the industry through the production and distribution of career videos showcasing these roles.

To further encourage operator participation at all levels, we have developed a number of National and State industry awards with the support of very generous sponsoring partners. We hope to see many more operators taking the opportunity to find out about these awards.

By participating fully at Association events, “operational professionals” can improve their knowledge and skills, in turn allowing them to improve their own performance and that of the systems they operate and control.

In closing, we’d like to extend an invitation to anyone employed in the operational side of the water industry to assist us in our mission to deliver improvements from the ground up. You can do this by becoming a member of the Association and by proactively sharing any knowledge or information with your water industry colleagues.