

# 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. In recent times, WIOA members have had to deal with catastrophic fire, drought, cyclones and floods and in the face of changing climate conditions, these extreme events are likely to become more prevalent. WIOA understands the unique issues people in such challenging roles face and therefore we aim 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 initiatives such as this event, the production of publications, and the staging of technical seminars to name just a few - all at an affordable cost.

From our humble beginnings in 1973 as just a Victorian wastewater association, WIOA has developed a history of providing excellent services to members. We now cover operational issues across all sectors of the water and wastewater industry in all States of Australia. This broadened focus was implemented in order to meet the changing needs of not only our members, but the water industry in general. In 2009 we boasted about reaching our 1000<sup>th</sup> Member. In early 2012 we are extremely 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 the 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. The main one is to provide operational staff a dedicated 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 operations professionals all in the one location.

We are actively developing technical resources based on industry best practice outcomes and in 2012 we are committed to releasing the remaining three books that make up the wastewater series of ‘Practical Guides’. The completed water series of ‘Practical Guide’ books have had a second edition printed for some titles due to their applicability in day-to-day water operations.

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

From 2008, WIOA has been a driving force behind the development of minimum standards of training and experience for operators, in conjunction with an “Operator Certification” scheme. In 2011 this became a reality in Victoria and WIOA is currently the only body “endorsed” by the Victorian Department of Health to certify operators.

It is pleasing that as a result of our efforts, this issue has now also gained national importance with a project to develop a Framework for a National Certification scheme recently undertaken. The project was managed by Government Skills Australia under a National Water Commission (NWC) contract with the concept supported by COAG. WIOA was an active member of the Steering Committee coordinating this project. In order to better understand the potential impact of this important reform on both operators and water enterprises, we have participated in numerous briefing sessions across five States. It is important to note that the brief for this particular project was just to develop a National Framework proposal which was submitted to NWC at the end of March 2012.

Although implementation is not part of this initial project, a companion report outlining all the issues, barriers, impediments and potential cost implications if the proposed Framework is adopted, was also submitted. WIOA is confident that the Framework has been developed in a manner that is robust enough to be workable in the biggest to the smallest water supply enterprises nationally. Most importantly, it is a step in the right direction to recognise the important tasks and the range of skills and experience necessary to be a competent water industry operator.

It would be very disappointing if the amount of time, energy and work committed to this project was wasted through inaction for whatever reason. WIOA will continue lobbying for the implementation of the Framework on National basis and we will also do our best to see the scheme expanded to cover wastewater and other operational disciplines throughout 2012 and beyond.

## **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 all your knowledge and information with your water industry colleagues.