

WIOA REPORT



Paper Presented by:

Cynthia Lim

Author:

Cynthia Lim, Operations Manager,

WIOA



*73rd Annual Water Industry Engineers and Operators' Conference
Bendigo Exhibition Centre
31 August to 2 September, 2010*

INTRODUCTION TO WIOA

For those people new to this event and WIOA, we'd like to take this opportunity to introduce you to the Association and what we are all about.

The Water Industry Operators Association of Australia (WIOA) has a long history of servicing its members and those employed in the "operational" sector of the water industry. WIOA started out in Victoria in 1973, and was originally set up as the Wastewater Purification Plant Superintendent and Operators Association - a wastewater employees self help group. Since that time, the Association has continually evolved and expanded its focus. From our humble beginnings in just wastewater, we now cover operational issues across all sectors of the water and wastewater industry. This broadened focus was implemented in order to meet the changing needs of our members and the water industry in general.

After trying unsuccessfully for many years to establish branches outside Victoria, from 2000 we dropped the Victorian name and have expanded to become a truly National organisation. We now have Members from every Australian State and Territory and many from New Zealand as well and coming from all sectors of the Water Industry. It was an exciting time for the Association in March 2009 when for the first time, we passed the 1,000 Member mark – a very special achievement. We now look forward keenly to the day we sign up our 2,000th Member. That WIOA has grown and developed to its current size and holds such a respected profile within water industry circles, is testament to the resilience of the model put in place 37 years ago by the Association founders.

Until fairly recently, we have operated entirely as a voluntary group. In order to meet the demands of 2010, we have a full time Executive Officer assisted by an Operations Manager and two administrative support staff. We also have a highly committed voluntary committee and a growing network of supporters in all States.

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.

WIOA SERVICES

One of WIOA's main aims 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 aims 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 workshops, major conferences like this one which incorporate large trade exhibitions, and opportunities to visit water and wastewater facilities in both Australia and Internationally.

We are actively developing technical resources based on industry best practice outcomes. We also produce our own Journal and a number of other Member focused publications.

We have 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 (GSA WIAC). The water industry skills shortage has been well documented and at a number of water industry forums, we have been actively promoting the strategic importance to the community of water industry operational staff and we have been working hard with other organisations to help develop solutions to operational training issues. Additionally, 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 various levels, along with a number of very generous sponsoring partners, we have developed a number of industry awards. We hope to see many more operators taking the opportunity to find out about these awards.

WIOA is a strong voice in a number of industry forums and working groups and has regularly made representations to State and Federal government inquiries commenting on operational aspects of the water industry.

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.

PRIORITY ISSUES

For a number of years, WIOA has been actively working with various water industry regulators and strongly advocating the introduction of mandated minimum training and skills requirements and a national "Operator Certification" system. Importantly, the consultation process undertaken thus far has revealed strong support for the implementation of such a system. We have been overwhelmed by the encouragement of a number of water industry organisations and many interest groups in all Australian States who are keen to make sure this happens.

In conjunction with the Department of Health and the Water Corporations in Victoria we have developed such a system which is about to be implemented. The next step is to roll this out into all States and doing this will be a priority area for us in 2010.

The WIOA strategic plan was updated in late 2008. It reflects the goals and strategies we intend to achieve for the WIOA and in particular our members. The plan is comprehensive and provides the Executive, Committee and members many and varied exciting challenges.

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 quest to deliver operational 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.