

Background

The water industry is constantly evolving. While the core role of each organisation remains largely the same, the methods used to deliver these services can differ. How these services differ, are usually kept within the organisation due to limited opportunities of networking.

The NODP was first thought about in 2016 by a couple dedicated water industry workers and then established in 2017 with the support of WIOA and The Human Resource special interest group.

Introduction 2025

2025 NODP consisted of 15 operators from across Victoria as well as 6 advisory committee board members. This allowed networking from as far North-East Albury, South-East as Traralgon to as far South-West as Warrnambool. The year consisted of 7 sessions. 1 session a month completed over 2 days. One field/tour day and the second consisting of a theoretical day. Each session, Three (3) participants were to present to the class regarding the session before, or something going on in their organisation such as large projects or new ways to complete works etc.

The sessions were tailored to expand the operator's knowledge across all water boards in participation, ranging from best industry practice to new technologies.

The operators communicated heavily through WhatsApp and email, sharing work related problems, concerns, personal milestones and celebrations.

Program

Session 1-Tullamarine

On the first day, the 2026 NODP group was introduced to the committee and operators, followed by a Q&A with Managing Directors **Andrew Jeffers** from Wannon Water, **Sarah Cumming** from Gippsland Water, and **Maree Lang** from Greater Western Water. They shared insights into the responsibilities and challenges of their roles. On the second day, **Mike Rankin** led personality profiling sessions. As a team, we also created a shared trademark and committed to holding each other accountable throughout the year.

Session 2 - Melton

On the first day, we toured the Hoppers Crossing SPS operated by Melbourne Water, then visited Deer Park to see how PVC and PE pipes are manufactured. We also spent time at the GWW Training Facility with Greater Western Water, where we watched a live water main repair and learned how hydro-excavated soil is recycled back into topsoil, along with best practices for storing pipes and fittings.

Session 3 – Traralgon

On the first day, at Gippsland we had a tour with one of the operators of their depot. We went through the layout of their trucks and sheds as well as an overall site tour. On the second day **Chris Wood (GM)** welcomed the team and spoke to them about the

opportunities working for the water board can give you. We then went onto a presentation from **Ryan Davis** about intelligent water networks (IWN) program, as well as leak detection solutions from **Bryce & Hugh** from aqua analytics. **Michael Wink** went through a working safely with metal assets and electricity (plumbguard)

Session 4 – Ballarat

On the first day we toured the Bungal dam, Lal Lal Water Treatment Plant as well as the Lal Lal Pump house. On the second day GMW went through HCB vehicles as well as CCTV targeted programs and their safety equipment. **Jenith Jesuthasan** from Greater Western Water went through a presentation on odour control issues while going over specific odour issues and controls. SPS VS Network the different carbon filters, ferrox and rising main H2S issues. KOR demonstrated the different types of jetter heads they use and explained how each one works in various scenarios, showing them live inside a clear pipe.

Session 5 – Wodonga.

The first day in Wodonga & Albury we were taken for a tour of the wetlands as well as the treatment plant and treated water pumps with **Shawn, Nick and Aaron** from North East Water. The second day **John Day** (GM) spoke to the team about environment, systems and operations followed by a in-depth prestation from xylem pumps and how the pump curve work and the different kinds of pumps for ponticular jobs. To finish the day the team went to the Albury ACC depot with Clinton Crocker to go through inspection, dismantle and impeller clearance checks on sewer pumps and safe lifting methods.

Session 6 – Warrnambool

We learned how Wannon Water manages and prioritises asset renewals across its reticulation and sewer networks using data-driven decision-making and Power BI reporting, including when assets are run to failure depending on site conditions. They have recently transitioned to the IBM Maximo work order system to improve maintenance tracking and efficiency. We also toured the Warrnambool WRP upgrade, where we saw upgrades addressing previous plant issues, and observed their strong culture of accountability, fatigue management compliance, and the use of pump snoring and GPS mapping to reduce costs and improve asset accuracy.

Session 7 - Shepparton

First day in Shepparton Neville Whittaker and Mark Putman went through the pipes and fitting storage as well as pipe cleaning and hard waste areas. They then went into the ice pigging and NO-DES completed for GV Water. The team also went to challenger Valves new warehouse where the team got to have a hands on experience adjusting PRV's under pressure. On the second day we spoke to Daniel Flanagan (GM) from GV Water and how he is in his position. Neville Whittaker went into more detail on GV Water's Hydro handling using non-destructive vac. Also handling of AC and hard waste. Followed by Adam Carty presentation "Coach to Coach" showing different ways to speak and understand how people interpretant things by the way you say it. And to finish the day off the team had a debrief of WOIA 2026 and our whole experience of NOPD.

Feedback from 2025 participants

Matt Bowden (Greater Western Water) –

“The experience exceeded expectations in a positive way, as it was interesting, enjoyable, and fun. It provided valuable learning through new challenges and hands-on experiences, offering insights that wouldn’t have been gained otherwise. Exploring new places and seeing things from different perspectives made it especially memorable and rewarding.”

Brianna Patrick (Lower Murray Water) –

“The Network operator developed program gives the operators the opportunity to expand their knowledge of their field of work as well as the opportunity to learn more about the different jobs that go along with working for a waterboards across Victoria. Networking with other waterboards as well as your own co-works that you wouldn’t normally work with has helped gain confidence and leadership skills that can only explain and open more opportunity's”

Nathan Beasley (North East Water) –

“I attended the Network Operator Development Program determined to fully engage and challenge myself, and it exceeded my expectations. I built strong professional relationships, gained valuable practical knowledge in water reticulation best practice, and developed the confidence to apply these learnings in my workplace. The experience had a lasting impact on both my skills and mindset.”

Kaitlyn Ward (Wannon Water) –

“The experience was outstanding and gave me valuable insights into innovative maintenance practices that I’ve since applied in my role. It also connected me with a supportive network of professionals I can reach out to for advice and learning. I would strongly recommend the program to anyone considering it.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 2025 Network Operator Development Program offered a comprehensive learning experience for water operators across Victoria. Through site tours, hands-on demonstrations, and theoretical sessions, participants gained practical insights into water and sewer operations, asset management, and emerging technologies. The program fostered networking, teamwork, and accountability while reinforcing best practices, safety, and fatigue management, equipping operators with the skills and knowledge to improve efficiency, innovation, and reliability in their organisations.

This year we celebrate 10 years of the NODP and all of its success and we look forward to many more.