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TRANSITION *** INHERITANCE ***** SCOPE**



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INTRODUCTION

This paper is being presented not as a highly technical paper, but it is what it is, and what has happened in the South East Queensland Water Industry during the last 12 months or so. The reformation processes that have occurred, and also the new vision for the future of the water supply industry in this area, can, and no doubt will be beneficial one in the long term. It is not the be all or end all of happiness and/or frustrations, but if we keep focused on what is required of us as individuals, together we will make it work.

MOTTO: -

You have to be serious about what you are required to do, but you do not have to be serious in how you do it. Keep smiling.

Prior to presenting this paper I would just like to make it clear that the content is derived from my experience in water treatment operations as a “hands-on” worker from the coalface. There is no intended malice towards any individual, or “finger-pointing” towards any level of government.

1.0 TRANSITION

Most of you would by now be aware of the recent Queensland State Government takeover of Raw Water Storages and Water Treatment Plants throughout South East Queensland. Many of the operational staff involved would share my opinion that it has been a very bumpy ride to date.

Some of the staff of this new Entity, being Queensland Bulk Water Supply Authority trading as Seqwater, started the same day as the Queensland Council Amalgamations took place, and others moved over on the 30th June 2009. The transition has been dubbed by many in the industry as a hard transition, in the fact that it seemed to happen very quickly.

To make good decisions you need good information, and in retrospect of what has happened, there would perhaps have been better or different recommendations if more time was allocated to research and planning, prior to implementation. This may well have led to a smoother transition for staff.

Local Government amalgamations that were happening at the same time also had a huge significance on the whole show. The changes people had to make, and still are dealing with is huge, and has had an effect on the overall structure in the entire Local and State Government scene.

The transitional decisions that were made by several Councils` tended to be very ad hoc and operational staff have found themselves in the position where they have had to make the transition work for both parties.

Seqwater is now a large organisation that is seeing rapid change. The following points are all impacting on the reform process:

- The operation and management of some 24 referable dams and 47 WTPs
- Plants that range from plain chlorination to advanced treatment
- Internal Water quality targets that cannot be achieved at some sites without significant financial input for upgrades to infrastructure. Some existing plants are not even able to always meet all ADWG aesthetic parameters.
- The “bringing together” of many varied cultures from within the industry
- Changes to legislation that dictate stringent water quality guidelines
- Accountability and transparency to a degree that has not been seen previously
- Strict OH&S requirements
- Training and re-training of staff to ensure competency levels are maintained
- Production of water that is not “only safe”, but also aesthetically pleasing
- New technology to SE Queensland such as Ultra-filtration and Desalination
- The introduction of “water-grid” systems

The ADWGs encompass a catchment to tap approach and Seqwater has to encompass a beach to bush approach, and ensure that it caters for everything in between

Never mind we are where we are, we have to deal with the future base on experience from the past.

2.0 INHERITANCE

With the transition and take-over of water treatment assets, which range from Catchment to Storage to Treatment and to Supply, one can imagine the changes that were placed upon all people involved from management to staff and also to contractors.

In our area we have inherited a few Treatment plants that have been not kept up to date. It is no one’s fault, but in small Council’s management can only do what seems best, with what funds are available. The Operators have often done more than what was asked of them, and tried to improve and implement what changes that seemed necessary, to remedy any given situation.



THEN

NOW

In particular one WTP that which transitioned had received little or no upgrades or improvements to help its performances in its 40-year plus lifetime. Small things were done over time to meet demand, but water quality was left by the wayside. This was the way small country towns have done things for a long time, and more focus had been put on infrastructure of roads and bridges along with waste management (to a degree), than water and sewerage infrastructure. Water is the basis of life, and safe drinking water should be the right of every Australian that is connected to a reticulated supply in any town or city.

3.0 SCOPE

With what has been happening across South East Queensland over last 12 months or so, in regards to Water Treatment and Water Reform Processes, all involved have had to put in extra effort to cope with the increase in workload.

But, fruits of the changes, to meet the requirement, set before us all are starting to take place. With the extra support, and help that has been offered by our new peers, process /quality control staff, catchment staff and management, but also not forgetting the most important ones, the maintenance staff, we are progressing reasonably well.

To date the amount of improvements in our area (Somerset) has been fantastic. Not sure if we were a particularly bad area to start with, but I can recall a high-level staff member in the organization saying at the start, that Somerset has a number of risks for us. That may have been the case, and it sure has been the focus of numerable upgrades and rectifications.

WPH&S issues have been progressively addressed, with great progress in rectification of work that has been a blessing to the operators. With stairs replacing ladders, and aluminum lids replacing rotten timber covers, gas chlorine installations being upgraded to meet the standards. There is a long way to go yet, but we also have come a long way.

Water Quality improvements, the main priority of Seqwater, well what can I say but this, things are happening big time and it can only be for the better. The introduction of HACCP also will be beneficial over time, to ensure we can achieve the water quality results that now are now mandatory. Remember these plants were managed mainly to meet demand, but still not forgetting water quality parameters being reached, with what info and support that was given to the operators. Again this new venture, comes with the help of our fellow water industry personnel, and we can only further progress to the organizations` goal of the assurance of continuity of supply of a safe, aesthetically pleasing water-supply for all.

In finishing up I would like you all too perhaps just spend a few seconds to ponder over a quote from Leonardo da Vinci:

“Water is the driving force of all nature”