

# CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES AND SMALL TOWN SEWERAGE SCHEMES



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# CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES AND THEIR ROLE IN SMALL TOWN SEWERAGE SCHEMES

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## ABSTRACT

A Consultative Committee/Project Monitoring Team was established to assist in the implementation of the proposed sewerage scheme in the township of Koroit. This was not the first time South West Water Authority (SWWA), had used such a committee but a scheme the author was involved in from its inception.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

As a result of the Water Industry management Study the Hopkins Region Water Authority was formed on 1 July 1994 encompassing 17 urban communities from within 7 former authorities. The HRWA was renamed in January 1995 as the South West Water Authority.

The SWWA inherited a number of works in progress. The Koroit Sewerage Reticulation Scheme was one of these. In 1977 a feasibility study was commissioned by the Koroit Borough Council. A second report was undertaken in 1985, reviewing the first report and emphasising the danger of effluent contaminating the aquifers that are the source of the towns water supply.

In 1987 the Shire of Warrnambool as successor to the Borough of Koroit, conducted a public meeting and started the process of proclaiming a sewerage district. After the Shire of Belfast filed objections based on the proposed siting of the treatment works, (biological stabilisation ponds) in its district, the project did not proceed any further.

In 1991 Fisher Stewart undertook studies on alternative waste water disposal options for Koroit. A Common Effluent Disposal System and Conventional Sewerage System were analysed. On balance, consultants favored the technical and environmental advantages of a Conventional Sewerage System.

A report was lodged with the Office of Water Resources in June 1993. A quick response from the O.W.R questioned the unexplored issue of Koroit connecting to the Warrnambool system at Dennington and dismissed the issue of a joint Koroit/Murray Goulburn shared treatment facility. Discussions continued between the Shire and Fisher Stewart, but prospective studies did not proceed as water industry restructuring moved onto the local scene.

## 2.0 REVIEW OF THE SCHEME

In April 1995 S.W.W.A reviewed the Koroit Sewerage Scheme and put forward the following recommendations :-

- ◆ The sewerage of Koroit by Conventional System be included in the 1995/96 Business Plan as 1998/99/2000 projects of the Authority.
- ◆ The report and associated issues, including community consultation be discussed with the Shire of Moyne.

- ◆ That the Authority indicate its willingness to proceed with the project subject to Local/Federal/Municipal support.

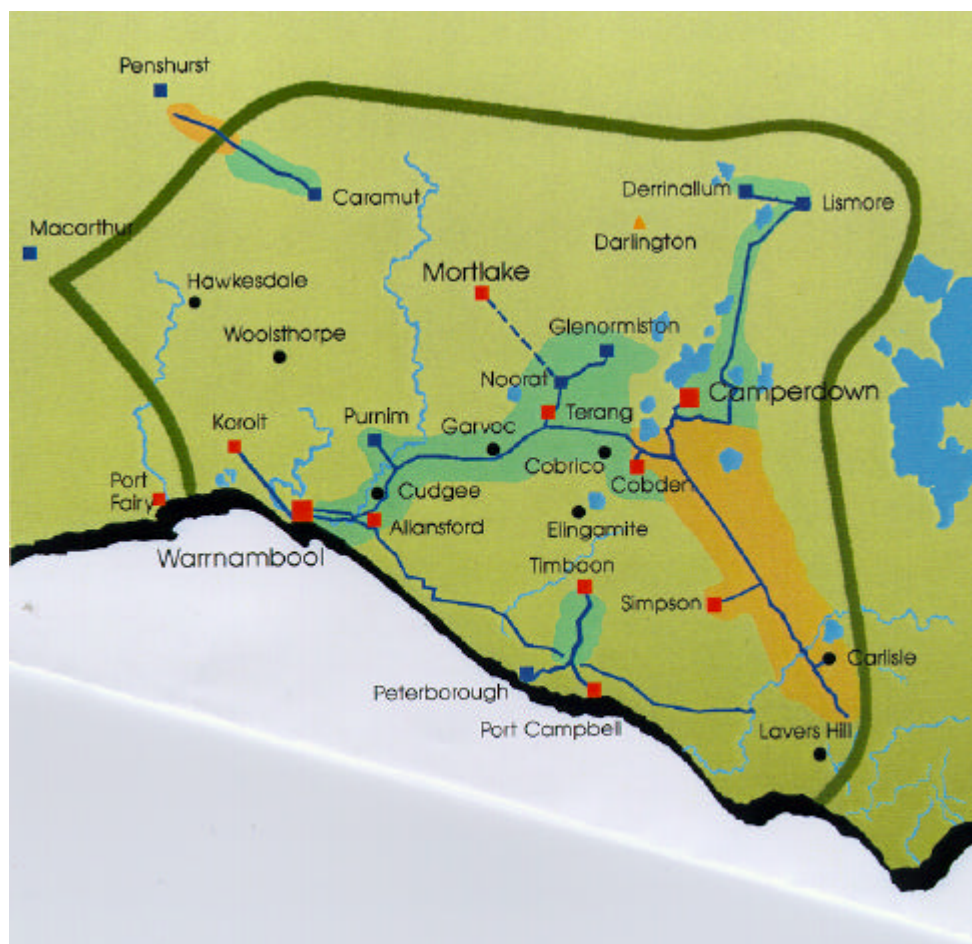
Implementation of schemes of this nature is largely dependant on the enthusiasm with which the Council and general community ‘push’ the proposal.

The main issues in implementing the scheme were:-

- ◆ The identified need
- ◆ Council Support
- ◆ Community Support

To that end the Authority proposed to proceed and install a Sewerage Reticulation scheme to serve the township of Koroit.

**Figure 1:** *South West Water Authority Locality map*



### 3.0 IMPLEMENTATION

Planning and preparation for the scheme was to take approximately 18 months. SWWA decided as in previous schemes, to seek expressions of interest from Koroit residents to form a Community Consultative Committee/Project Monitoring Team.

On 1<sup>st</sup> March 1997, SWWA placed an advertisement in the local newspapers and in a newsletter to all Koroit property owners.

The intention of this committee would be to :

- ◆ Maintain effective communication with residents
- ◆ Monitor progress with the project working group.

The first meeting was in June 1997 where eight Koroit representatives were appointed :-

Steve Maddex	Carolina Symons
Lou Hollis	Bob Shanahan
Julian McElgunn	Pauline McCarthy
Sheryl Duncan	Des Noonan

The other members of the team were :-

Neville Smith –Board Member – SWWA  
Marie Thornton – Board Member – SWWA  
Paul Younis – Operation Manager – SWWA  
Russell Worland – C.E.O – SWWA  
Anthony Evans – Koroit Operations – SWWA

No community nomination was rejected. Willingness to nominate was regarded as demonstrating keen personal interest.

S.W.W.A was very appreciative of the sense of Community interest and civic responsibility that prompted representatives to nominate.

It was decided to meet monthly with the option to meet more or less frequently depending on issues that arose. The team wanted to issue regular newsletters and to develop the very best ways of communicating with the people of Koroit. The team members were asked to listen to concerns and bring matters either directly to the attention of the C.E.O or to the next team meeting depending on urgency.

A regular community newsletter was designed to keep property owners informed of developments throughout the planning, design and construction phases. The most common questions being asked were incorporated and if possible answered in each edition. Advice on health issues, tariffs, repayment options and property connections ended to be the most commonly asked about.

Some of the Koroit team members were involved in business houses in the town so they were very accessible to local residents. They proved to be invaluable as a lot of older residents tended to trust them more than a voice over the phone or a face they did not know. Another factor with the older residents was the inability to travel to Warrnambool or the fact that they did not wish to drive in a busy town. With this in mind team members were able to speak directly with engineering staff involved in the project and pass on information as requested.

SWWA considered continuing communication with Koroit townspeople to be of the upmost importance and, through the community newsletters, kept urging customers to contact community representatives or SWWA personnel if they had any queries.

An open day was held in November 1997 was attended by 150 people to discuss individual plans with the monitoring team. As of November, 350 of the 660 plans issued had been returned with minor or no alterations to connection points. This was considered an excellent response and demonstrated the strong community interest in the scheme. The involvement of property owners in the design process proved to be very useful as property records were updated by both the consultants survey work and contributions from property owners.

Members of the team also became involved in the funding options/repayment schemes and sourcing of funding from Government Departments.

Another initiative of SWWA was inspection of properties by the Plumbing Industry Board. Every house was visited and a written report on the state of the sewerage system and modifications was submitted to the owner and SWWA.

At times during construction, the team members were involved in minor changes to connection points, cleaning up and reinstatement of lawns and roads. These problems were then brought to the attention of the Contractor and rectified as soon as possible by their personnel.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The following points emphasise the beneficial outcomes of a commitment to community consultation via a project monitoring committee.

- ◆ Team members gain a sense of pride and know they have helped the community by their involvement.
- ◆ Easier access to SWWA staff by team members seeking information for residents.
- ◆ Frees up office staff and allows free flow of information.
- ◆ Breaks down barriers between Authority and elderly members of the community
- ◆ Gives towns people an idea of how much work is involved in organising such a scheme.
- ◆ Enables community access to as much information as possible without public meetings and work after hours of S.W.W.A staff
- ◆ Allows the Authority to get a sense of problems and concerns and to solve small issues before they become big issues.