SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION OF A NEW OPERATING CONTRACT - AN OPERATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

In June 2014, Veolia was awarded a contract to operate and maintain Hunter Water’s 25 treatment plants. Under the eight year contract Veolia will operate and maintain the plants which supply drinking water and wastewater treatment services to over half a million people in six local government areas.

Operational establishment under the new contract commenced in earnest in July 2014. This involved various establishment activities undertaken in order to meet the October 1st operations launch. It was very important that any impact to existing staff was carefully managed throughout the entire operational transition.

To assist in the smooth handover of operations, Veolia provided experienced operators from other established contacts to spend a period of 2 weeks working alongside operators on the Hunter Water plants. These operators provided support and coaching in Veolia’s systems and processes. This paper is presented from the perspective of an operator, brought in from the Victorian team to assist in the transition of the Hunter Water operations.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In June 2014, Veolia was awarded a contract to operate and maintain Hunter Water's 25 treatment plants. The $279 million contract is the largest ever awarded by Hunter Water. It came after a 12 month tender process, overseen by independent procurement specialists to ensure the integrity of the process.

Under the eight year contract Veolia will operate and maintain the plants which supply drinking water and wastewater treatment services to over half a million people in seven local government areas. The area of operation covers 6,671 km² with a population of over half a million people in the local government areas of Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Dungog and parts of Singleton.

The scope requires delivery of the following services to a high level of quality and consistency, whilst ensuring savings of $23 million are achieved over the life of the Contract:

- Operation and maintenance of six water treatment plants;
- Operation and maintenance of nineteen wastewater treatment works;
- Operation and maintenance of one advanced water treatment plant;
- Bio-solids and residuals management and disposal;
- Delivery of preventive maintenance (as specified by the client), corrective and breakdown maintenance; and
- Input to asset management strategies, maintenance planning and capital works planning.
Figure 1: The Hunter Water Contract, Relative to Veolia’s other NSW Regional Operating Contracts

This paper is presented from the perspective of an operator brought in from the Victorian team to assist in the transition of the Hunter Water operations. The following sections will discuss:

- The operational support provided from other regions within the Veolia business
- The role of a transition operator, and
- A specific case study of one transition operator, their perspective and thoughts on the transition.

2.0 DISCUSSION

Operational establishment under the new contract commenced in earnest in July 2014. A partnering charter was signed between Hunter Water and Veolia, setting out both companies expectations during the transition and over the course of the contract. Throughout July and August there was an intensive recruitment process, a structured change management process, as well as induction and training sessions for almost 70 staff.

It was very important that any impact to existing staff was carefully managed throughout the entire transition. Hunter Water took great care to ensure the contract included provision of choices for affected employees, including the option of accepting employment with Veolia for a guaranteed period of time.

In addition to the above, a number of establishment activities were undertaken in order to meet the October 1st operations launch:

- A temporary office was established;
- A program of procurement of vehicles, trucks, other plant parts and equipment
- Full management plans endorsed prior to the commencement of operations.
The Victorian team rallies to support the Hunter Water transition

The Veolia Victorian water operations team has been providing water and wastewater services to our valued clients in the Central Victorian region for over twelve years. We felt it was important to draw upon our wealth of knowledge, experience and skills within the Victorian team to support the transition of such an important new operating contract.

The Victorian team provided a significant input to the transition in a number of ways:

- The previous Victorian Operations Manager is now the Operations Manager for the Hunter Water Contract.
- Two plant supervisors spent a total of 5 weeks assisting the Hunter Water Contract team with recruitment, as well as site inspections, establishment of operational management systems and documentation.
- Newly recruited operators and supervisors from the Hunter Water Contract were hosted at Victorian sites to learn about Veolia’s business culture, systems and operational practices.
- Four Victorian operators each spent a period of 2 weeks working alongside operators on the Hunter Water plants, providing support and coaching in Veolia’s systems and processes.

The role of a transition operator

Prior to awarding of the Hunter Water Contract, the practice at the Hunter Water plants was for operations and maintenance roles to be performed by two discrete teams. However, under the new operating contract, Veolia has adopted an “Operator-Maintainer” model. Hence a component of the transition operator’s role was to assist the newly recruited Hunter Water Contract staff in transitioning to the new mode of operation.
Broadly speaking, each of the transition operators provided the following support to the new staff:

- Coaching of new operators towards adoption of the Veolia operator-maintainer model
- Introducing operators to the Veolia intranet and software, including the computerised maintenance management system (GAMA), online safety and environmental (SHEQ) reporting system and the document management system.
- Familiarising operators with Veolia’s onsite safety and contractor management systems, such as job safety analysis (JSEA’s), work permits and inductions.

Figure 3: Grahamstown Water Treatment Plant, One of the Six Drinking Water Treatment Plants Under the Hunter Water Contract.

2.3 A case study in the experiences of a transition operator – Gavin Allen

Background and experience

I’m a qualified plumber and have worked in the Veolia Victorian operations team for almost four years. I started out as a waste water treatment operator and transitioned across to drinking water operations around eighteen months ago. I have a Certificate III in Water Operations. I’m currently working towards achieving certification under the Victorian Drinking Water Operator Competency Best Practice Guidelines and the WIOA Certification Scheme.

My motivation for volunteering as a transition operator for the Hunter Water Contract was to gain more experience, as well as see different treatment processes and operations.

Working as a transition operator

I spent two weeks working onsite alongside the Hunter Water operators from the 13th of October 2014. During my secondment I worked on a number of sites, including Dungog, Grahamstown, Lemon Tree Passage, Anna Bay, Nelson Bay, Burwood Beach, and Shortland.
Typical activities that were undertaken included:

- Introduction to permitting systems,
- assisting with maintenance activities,
- working with the maintenance management system (GAMA),
- walking operators through routine inspections and labs, and
- Veolia’s approach to management of OHS.

The following gives a brief day-by-day overview of my time with the Hunter Water Contract:

**Day 1** – Based at the Grahamstown WTP, activities included a plant familiarisation with the onsite operators. Working with the team to assist them with our safety and work permitting systems, HR management software, GAMA software and intranet.

**Day 2** - Grahamstown WTP. More work with the team on implementation of safety systems, intranet and maintenance management.

**Day 3** - Do “The Bay Run” with the Hunter operators, visiting 3 sites in one day. Sites included Lemon Tree Passage, Anna Bay and Nelson Bay. Working with the operators to assist them with implementing our safety systems. Assist with maintenance activities onsite.

**Day 4** - Based at Dungog WTP. Activities included a plant familiarisation with the onsite operators. Working with the team to assist them with our safety and work permitting systems, HR management software, GAMA software and intranet.

**Day 5** - Dungog WTP. More work with the team on implementation of safety systems, intranet and maintenance management.

**Day 6** - Based at Burwood Beach WWTP. Activities included a plant familiarisation with the onsite operators. Working with the team to assist them with our safety and work permitting systems, HR management software, GAMA software and intranet. Assist with maintenance activities onsite.

**Day 7** – Based at Shortland WWTP. Activities included a plant familiarisation with the onsite operators. Working with the team to assist them with our safety and work permitting systems, HR management software, GAMA software and intranet. Assist with maintenance activities onsite.

**Day 8** - Shortland WWTP. More work with the team on implementation of safety systems, intranet and maintenance management.

**Day 9** - Return home after a very interesting and rewarding trip!

**Benefits and challenges**

From my point of view, the benefits of providing support as a transition operator were that I was able to answer a lot of questions about our safety and maintenance approaches in Veolia. Every business does things a little differently and it helps to have someone to coach you in the new systems and processes.

I found the biggest challenge of working in a different region and with a different team was trying not to come across as a know it all. I didn’t want to sound like I was telling them how to their job. The Hunter Water team are a great group of operators and I enjoyed working with them.

I also found that I learned and gained a lot from the transition operator experience. I thought it was great to have the opportunity to gain more experience in a range of water and wastewater processes.
3.0 CONCLUSION

Careful management and planning of a new operational contract is essential to ensure a smooth transition and to minimise impact to customers and operational staff. Hunter Water and Veolia, have been working collaboratively to establish the new contract to operate and maintain Hunter Water's 26 treatment plants over the next eight years.

In order to support a smooth transition, four Victorian operators each spent a period of 2 weeks working alongside operators on the Hunter Water plants, providing support and coaching in Veolia’s systems and processes. Each of the transition operators provided the following support to the new staff:

- Coaching of new operators towards adoption of the Veolia operator-maintainer model
- Introducing operators to the Veolia intranet and software,
- Familiarising operators with Veolia’s onsite safety and contractor management systems.

The benefit of this approach is the ability for operators to directly share knowledge and experience, as well as demonstrate the operational and business culture in a practical way.

4.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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5.0 REFERENCES