

LOWER MACQUARIE WATER UTILITIES ALLIANCE: A QUANTUM LEAP IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT THINKING



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ABSTRACT

Some years ago six Councils of the Lower Macquarie Catchment formed a Water Utilities Alliance to provide a unified approach to the sustainable delivery of Water supply and Sewage Services.

Early results indicated positive outcomes and as a result of this further Councils have joined the Alliance.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Historically cooperation between Councils has been very poor or non-existent. The Lower Macquarie River Valley Alliance (LMWUA) was established in July 2008 and consisted of 6 Councils- Dubbo City, Bogan, Cobar, Narromine, Warren and Wellington Shires. Subsequently in May 2009, Bourke and Brewarrina Shire Councils were admitted as well.

The Alliance was working so well that four further Councils – Gilgandra, Coonamble, Walgett and The Warrumbungle’s have been accepted as members of the Alliance.

Forced Local Government amalgamations by the State Government prompted the formation of the Alliance.

2.0 DISCUSSION

2.1 The Benefits

The Lower Macquarie Water Utilities Alliance has allowed the councils to share resources and engage consultants for programs like integrated water cycle, drought management and Reservoir inspections.

The LMWUA was formed in 2008 when the state government announced it wanted to reduce the 104 separate utilities operating across New South Wales.

The Alliance has made great progress over the last 6 years.

"We've been able to move on in areas of best practice management in a number of areas to do with integrated water cycle management, demand management and drought management and the resource sharing and staff development policy is also being developed.

The Alliance was also formed for the benefit of the smaller councils as they do not have the expertise or the resources to carry out some of these mandatory studies."

The Alliance has become a state model for water management.

The Alliance seems to be ticking the boxes that the State government is looking for and some councils have expressed interest in looking at our alliance to see how it operates."

2.2 Objectives

- (a) Resource and staff skill sharing;
- (b) Water resource sharing opportunities;
- (c) Peer review of performance and mentoring where appropriate;
- (d) Development of shared best practice strategies;
- (e) Funding of best practice strategies and goals.

2.3 Saving Councils Money

"The Alliance has ensured cost effective delivery of Best Practice, and in addition to the grants received, has saved each Alliance member Council a considerable amount of money while maintaining community ownership and involvement."

LMWUA Technical committee chair at the time Cr Wilson believed the formation of the Alliance had provided benefits to the Communities in the Alliance area by moving towards more cost-effective and sustainable services, by providing networking opportunities and to the environment by working towards maximising the efficient use of water resources and by implementing best-practice technologies.

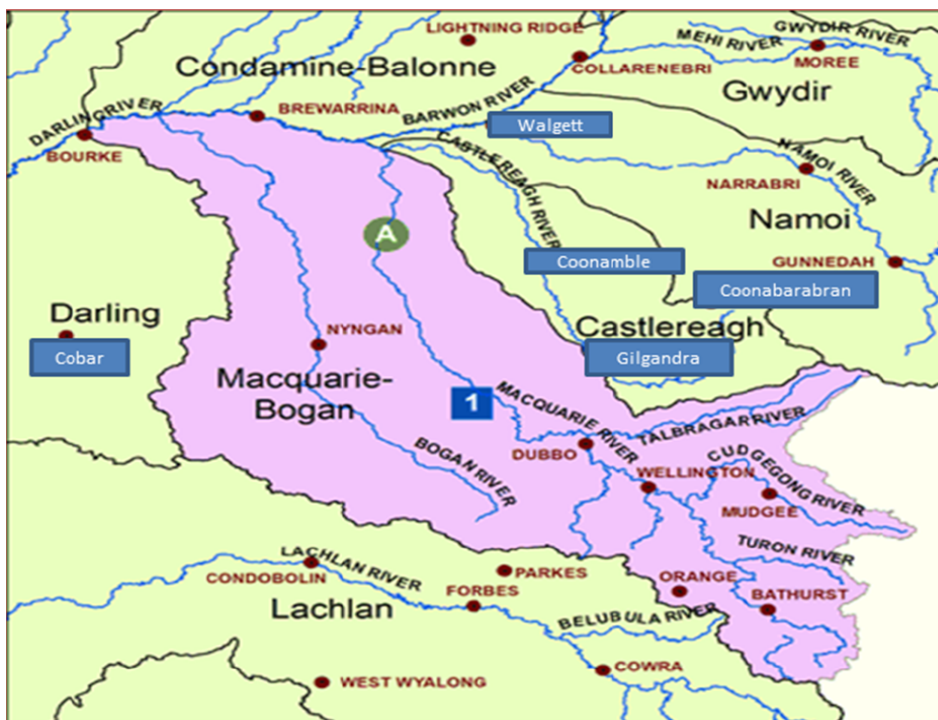
2.4 Award Winning

The Lower Macquarie Water Utilities Alliance (LMWUA) has been recognized in the National Local Government Awards by winning the 'Regional Collaborations in Small Councils' award.

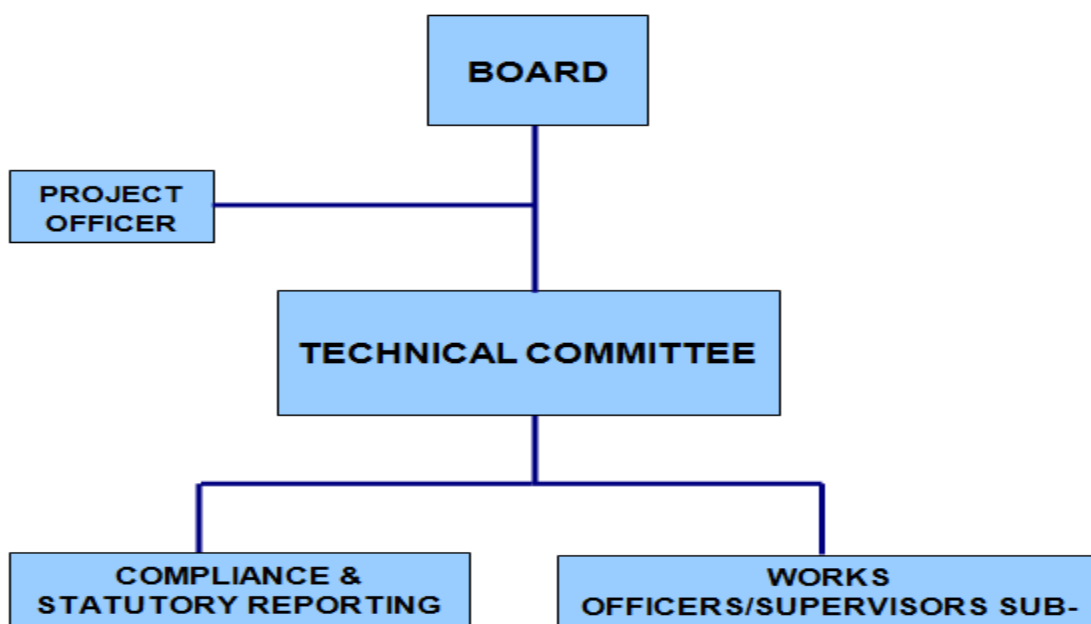
In the six years since the formation of the Alliance it has demonstrated both innovation and best practice principles in achieving:

- 100 per cent overall compliance with Best Practice requirements (from a base of 73% in 2008) as required by the NSW Office of Water and various COAG agreements.
- Successful applications for grants totalling \$451,800 under the Strengthening Basin Communities Program to develop regional strategies.

2.5 Macquarie River Valley



2.6 LMWUA Structure



3.0 CONCLUSION

The Alliance members feel that they have benefited from the Alliance by not having been forced into Local Government amalgamations.

Cooperation between a number of Councils has resulted in an improved lower cost and delivery of Chemicals through the Alliance.

Operators within the Alliance have reported that a much better repour with fellow Member Operators. As a result of this a network has been established allowing a much better discussion between Operators. This also allows Operators to share their problems and Technical issues.

Many projects common to all Councils such as demand management planning, Drought management planning, Water quality planning to ADWG requirements have been completed with the help of the Alliance.

Many Future projects are under consideration, some of these projects are, Alliance SCADA strategy, joint training for all Alliance Operators, Regional capital works funding plan and regional pricing policy.

Feedback from Operators regarding the Alliance has been very positive and has been helpful in their daily duties. Operators are very keen for the Alliance to continue.

From a personal point of view I find the Alliance extremely helpful to all the Operators and is a culmination of what the old Department of Public Works (DPW) inspectors have been trying to achieve since the mid 1970's.

4.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Stewart McLeod – Dubbo City Council for his very valuable input and his continued support of the Alliance.

Councillor Rex Wilson – Warren Shire Council for his valuable comments in Media outlets regarding the Alliance.

And all Utility members.