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# Overview of Local Government NSW Water Conference 26–28 June 2023 - Parkes NSW

*Responsible Officer: General Manager (Phillip Rudd)*

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## Recommendation

That the report be received and noted.

## Information

Rous County Council participated in this year's Water Conference which was held in Parkes NSW and represented by:-

- The Chair - Cr Robert Mustow
- Councillors - Sandra Humphrys and Big Rob
- Phillip Rudd - General Manager
- Tom Lloyd - Dams and Treatment Engineering Manager
- Rhys Oates - Dams and Treatment Assistant Team Leader

Below is a snippet of the jammed packed event.

**Monday** – proved to be a relaxing way to start off with registrations and a welcoming reception from Scott Phillips, Chief Executive from Local Government (LG NSW), Cr Ken Keith OAM, Mayor of Parkes Shire Council and a message from premier sponsor – Dr Annalisa Contos, Principal, Atom Consulting.

An early night was in order to recover from the travel and prepare for Tuesday's full agenda.

**Tuesday** – commenced at 9:00am with an introduction and overview of the day from the MC, Geoff Brailey and Welcome of Country by Geoff Anderson (Parkes Wiradjuri Language Group Coordinator) representing the Wiradjuri people.

The participants were then welcomed and addressed by the Mayor of Parkes - Cr Ken Keith OAM, Scott Phillips - Chief Executive LG NSW, Tanya Plibersek MP – Minister for the Environment and Water (pre-recorded) and Rose Jackson MLC – Minister for Water (Pre-recorded).

At approximately 9:45am a presentation was received from Graham Attenborough who stepped in for Amanda Jones, Deputy Secretary for the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) as she was unwell. This department is responsible for water security and managing NSW water resources, including surface and groundwater management. DPE assists local water utilities through planning, policy and regulation to ensure quality water services are provided throughout NSW.

Following on from DPE's presentation a panel discussion was held addressing the challenges of providing quality water supply to rural and remote communities. The Panel consisted of:

- Vince Keogh - Manager Aboriginal Communities Water and Sewerage Program (DPE),
- Sandy Leask - Senior Policy Adviser, NSW Health Water Unit,
- Leslie Jarvis - Senior Policy Adviser, NSW Health Water Unit,
- Danielle Francis - Manager, Policy and Strategy, Water Services Association, and
- Geoffrey Veneris - Production and Services Manager, Goldenfields Water.

After an overview from GHD, participants moved off to their selected Streams of interest.

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Following is information indicating the different Streams.

**Rous County Council** was involved in **Stream 3** whereby Tom Lloyd and Rhys Oates presented 'Maintaining Water and Sewer Services During a Major Flood'. They did Rous proud with an excellent presentation on how drinking water was managed and delivered amid the recent flood events.



Tom Lloyd - Dams and Treatment Engineering Manager



Rhys Oates – Dams and Treatment Assistant Leader

Joining the session were Mitchell Stace - Manager Water Project Delivery and Chenxi Zeng – Manager of Water Management and Treatment Mid Coast Council who discussed the delivery of sewer services in a separate flooding event.

After lunch, we were treated to a tour where Parkes Shire Council showcased its state-of-the-art infrastructure, including Water Treatment Plant, Wastewater Treatment Plant, Recycled Water Treatment Plant, and the Akuna Road Wetlands, rehabilitated maturation ponds that are now a thriving wetland system supporting a diverse range of native flora and fauna.

The day topped off by an enjoyable dinner sponsored by NSW Water Directorate and the presentation of the **Sam Samra Award 2023** to which (unbeknown to us) Rous was shortlisted as a finalist. This annual Award was established in 2017 as a memorial and acknowledgement of the late Sam Samra's long-term contribution, passion and dedication to the water industry. It is co-sponsored by Local Government NSW, the NSW Water Directorate and the Department of Industry - Water. Shoalhaven Water took out the award for this year.

The evening event cannot go without having guest speakers and John Sarkissian OAM did not disappoint with "The Dish and the Moon". The entertainment was, to say the least, spectacular with Elvis (aka Paul Fenech) entering the building and strutting his talent.

**Wednesday** – with a few tired feet and eyes from the night before, the day's program did not slow down.

We kicked off at 9:00am with an overview of the day then a Panel Discussion on 'A Work Force for the Future'. This discussion was centred around Local Water Utilities are experiencing a skills shortage crisis nation-wide. Measures to address the crisis by increasing skills and capacity are desperately required to reduce risk, support job growth and ensure safe and reliable water and sewerage services for NSW communities. This session will explore short to long term strategies. On the Panel were:-

- Grant Leslie - Director, Balmoral Group
- David Kirby - General Manager, Brewarrina Shire Council

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- Melissa Wortman - Senior Adviser Skills, Training and Workforce Development, DPE
  - Danielle Francis - Manager, Policy and Strategy, Water Services Association of Australia.

Professor Stuart Khan, Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of New South Wales (UNSW) provided insights to lessons learnt from some of recent years experiences in managing water during extreme events including droughts, fires and floods to enable improved future resilience.

After morning tea break, another panel discussion took place and this time, the topic was “Dammed if you do, dammed if you don’t”. Exploring the pros and cons of dam infrastructure for water supply and flood mitigation, versus the impact dams have on surrounding land, ecosystems, and local communities.

Before lunch, we participated three more sessions:-

- **Cybersecurity issues facing local water utilities** - Natasha Steele, Manager Vulnerability Management Centre, Cyber Security NSW and Andrew Crakanthorp, Chief Executive Officer, Riverina Water County Council

The increasing threat of cyber-attacks on government infrastructure, including local water utilities, poses a substantial risk to councils. This presentation will highlight the work being done by Cyber Security NSW through the sector wide 2021 NSW Cyber Security Strategy and its implications for local water utilities. This session will also include a real-world experience of a ransomware incident experienced by Riverina Water, lessons learned, and measures implemented to safeguard their operations.

- **Climate variability and change in NSW** - Matt Coulton, General Manager Agriculture and Water Bureau of Meteorology

The Bureau of Meteorology is best placed to support councils in establishing resilient infrastructure and communities in the face of increasing climate volatility.

- **Town Water Risk Reduction Program** - Jane Shepherd, Director, Local Water Utilities, Department of Planning and Environment

**Phase 2** The NSW Government has invested \$32.8 million to provide greater support for councils and Local Water Utilities. The Department of Planning and Environment will outline a suite of new initiatives that will form Phase 2 of the Town Water Risk Reduction Program.

We enjoyed an hour break for lunch, then into the homeward stretch of the conference with:-

- **Panel Discussion – Collaborative approach to water management** - Corinne Cheeseman, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Water Association - George Wall, Managing Director, Water Industry Operators Association of Australia - Andrew Francis, Director Infrastructure, Parkes Shire Council

This session will explore the benefits of alliances and collaborations between local water utilities and peak bodies, the private sector and government agencies to address challenges and opportunities.

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- **Net Zero Councils - Sewage and Water Treatment Efficiency Toolkit** - Lisa Miller, Senior Project Officer, Office of Energy and Climate Change

The Sustainable Councils program has been working to develop Net Zero targets for regional councils in NSW and help them develop plans and strategies for their journey to Net Zero. Working in collaboration with technical experts, Sewage Treatment Plants (STP) and Water Treatment Plants (WTP) have been identified as high energy users for Councils and in need of specific guidance within their Net Zero journey. This presentation will outline the components of a Net Zero Guide with a toolkit and business case template for STP's and WTPs.

- **Water as an economic driver – Parkes Shire Council** - Cr Ken Keith OAM, Mayor - Kent Boyd PSM, General Manager - Andrew Francis, Director Infrastructure Parkes Shire Council

Parkes Special Activation Precinct, an initiative identified as part of the NSW Government's 20-year Economic Vision for Regional NSW, provides a unique challenge for council, to provide both town water for residents and to secure water to attract business and investors, support local industries and fuel economic development. This presentation will outline how water has become an economic driver for council.

Wrap up and close of conference took place around 3:50pm with next year's conference being held at Goulburn 2024.