

WATER
QUALITY
RESEARCH
AUSTRALIA

STRATEGIC PLAN 2010 – 2015



THE TRUSTED PROVIDER OF SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE
NEEDED TO ENSURE SAFE WATER FOR AUSTRALIANS



TRUSTWORTHY >

INTEGRITY >

INNOVATIVE >

RESPONSIVE >

COLLABORATIVE >



WQRA delivers its business and strives to achieve its strategic aims by demonstrating the behaviours and values expected of a high-quality, professional, member based organisation.





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FROM THE CHAIR

The provision of sustainable clean safe drinking water is fundamental to the maintenance of our society. Water Quality Research Australia plays a major role in this task by facilitating and promoting research within the water industry to achieve this goal. WQRA is a unique association of water related organisations in Australia. Its three constituencies of industry, research providers and general members provide it with a clear perspective of national water research needs. WQRA is helping industry to achieve its goals in a shifting environment of responsibility for water supply. It harnesses local and international skills to achieve water research outcomes.

WQRA has established rigorous internal processes and extensive capabilities which, when coupled with the leverage available through its Member organisations, is able to deliver high quality outputs through its research and education programs that substantially close the gap between today's challenges and the desired levels of knowledge, skills and training.

WQRA also addresses the ongoing national need for a sustainable training program for young water professionals in a climate of limited national investment in training.

By 2015 WQRA will have built on its strong track record of achieving a prominent place in the Australian Water Community and will have consolidated its position as 'the trusted provider of scientific evidence needed to ensure safe water for Australians'. Today's broad support for WQRA from across the water industry will have been expanded, and WQRA will have established strong formalised relationships with government to incorporate national policy into the water quality research agenda. At the same time, continuing international engagement will ensure that 'world's best practice' will be adopted in Australia. With an expanded funding base, and its operational processes established and performing smoothly, WQRA will have the capacity to undertake the water quality research necessary to meet the needs of consumers and management agencies.

This Strategic Plan articulates the strategic aims and actions through which WQRA will deliver its objectives. It states the vision that has been developed by all WQRA stakeholders and underpins the annual business plans.

WQRA's Members can take pride in the organisation they have founded. My fellow Directors and I look forward to directing the implementation of this plan in coming years.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Professor Michael Moore



INTRODUCTION

With the impact of drought, climate change and population growth causing increasing stress on existing potable water supplies, both state and federal governments as well as the water industry has found it necessary to look towards alternative sources of water to supplement traditional supplies. Options being implemented or investigated around Australia include wastewater recycling, storm water harvesting, increased groundwater use and desalination.

This diversity has resulted in greater complexity in the management of water and presents new challenges for industry and regulators. Much of the emphasis in the media has been on water quantity. Water quality, however, can never be taken for granted particularly given that the pace of infrastructure change demands an accelerated focus on water quality. WQRA has been tasked by its Members and stakeholders to develop research programs that will allow Members to keep pace with change and to fulfil WQRA's vision as *"the trusted provider of scientific evidence needed to ensure safe water for Australians"*.



HISTORY

The Cooperative Research Centre for Water Quality and Treatment (CRCWQT) was formed under the Commonwealth Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program. Its participants included many of the significant players in the Australian water community. During its tenure of 13 years, the CRCWQT had a significant impact on the Industry bringing together industry and researchers to address priority issues in a collaborative and constructive way. At the conclusion of the CRCWQT, more than 80 Research Reports had been completed. One of the key outcomes of the CRCWQT was the translation of research outputs into the development of the Water Quality Management Framework, which was incorporated into the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines which, in turn, form the basis for the regulation of the drinking water industry.

As the CRCWQT approached the end of its funding cycle, the Governing Boards of the CRC and Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) worked together to establish a successor to the CRCWQT. The formation of Water Quality Research Australia Limited (WQRA) was an initiative of a significant representative group of Australia's water industry participants, water research centres and related organisations that saw the need for an independent organisation that could deliver a responsive research agenda to meet the needs of water supply managers in a time of accelerated change. WQRA was launched in late 2008 and has been incorporated as a not-for-profit, member funded organisation with a representative Board of Directors led by an independent Chair.

The establishment of WQRA marks the successful transition from a CRC model to an industry-funded company. The formation of WQRA also provides evidence of the commitment of the water industry and its research partners to continue to address the needs of the Australian water industry through its facilitation of excellence and collaboration in national water quality R&D projects.

PURPOSE AND FUNCTIONS

The primary aims of WQRA are to coordinate and manage a structured program of collaborative research in water quality and to ensure that the knowledge generated is transferred to industry. WQRA's focus is on national issues in water quality with an emphasis on improving public health for Australians, from both traditional water sources and new sources, including reuse water, utilisation of reuse water for industrial and agricultural applications, and aspects of wastewater management.

WQRA is committed to the highest standards of governance and independence, and to realising its vision and achieving its mission by demonstrating the behaviours and values expected of a professional, member based organisation.

VISION

The trusted provider of scientific evidence needed to ensure safe water for Australians

MISSION

To lead and facilitate high quality and collaborative research of national significance and to promote implementation of research outcomes to address current and emerging public health issues in water quality.

VALUES

Collaboration

Promote collaboration within the WQRA membership and the Australian water community

Trust

Facilitate trust through fair and transparent processes

Innovation

Provide innovative solutions to current and emerging research issues

Responsiveness

Be responsive to the needs of Members



MEMBERSHIP

WQRA's membership is both national and representative, covering all states and territories of Australia. Members include water utilities, research organisations/providers, private sector companies, and government departments and regulators.

LEVERAGING

Given the reduced funding base compared with that available to the CRCWQT, the key to WQRA's success in delivering its research agenda is its ability to successfully leverage:

- Member funding
- National and global research relationships
- Industry knowledge and resources

Significant effort is dedicated to ensuring that WQRA leverages each dollar to obtain the highest return on Members' investments. An integral component of this approach is to seek out both financial and in-kind support for projects from within the membership. WQRA achieves its objectives in large part through leveraging the resources of Industry Members, as well as Research and General Members, in research projects. The collective of Research, Industry and General Members achieves significantly more by sharing and leveraging knowledge, capability, capacity, experience and infrastructure.



KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

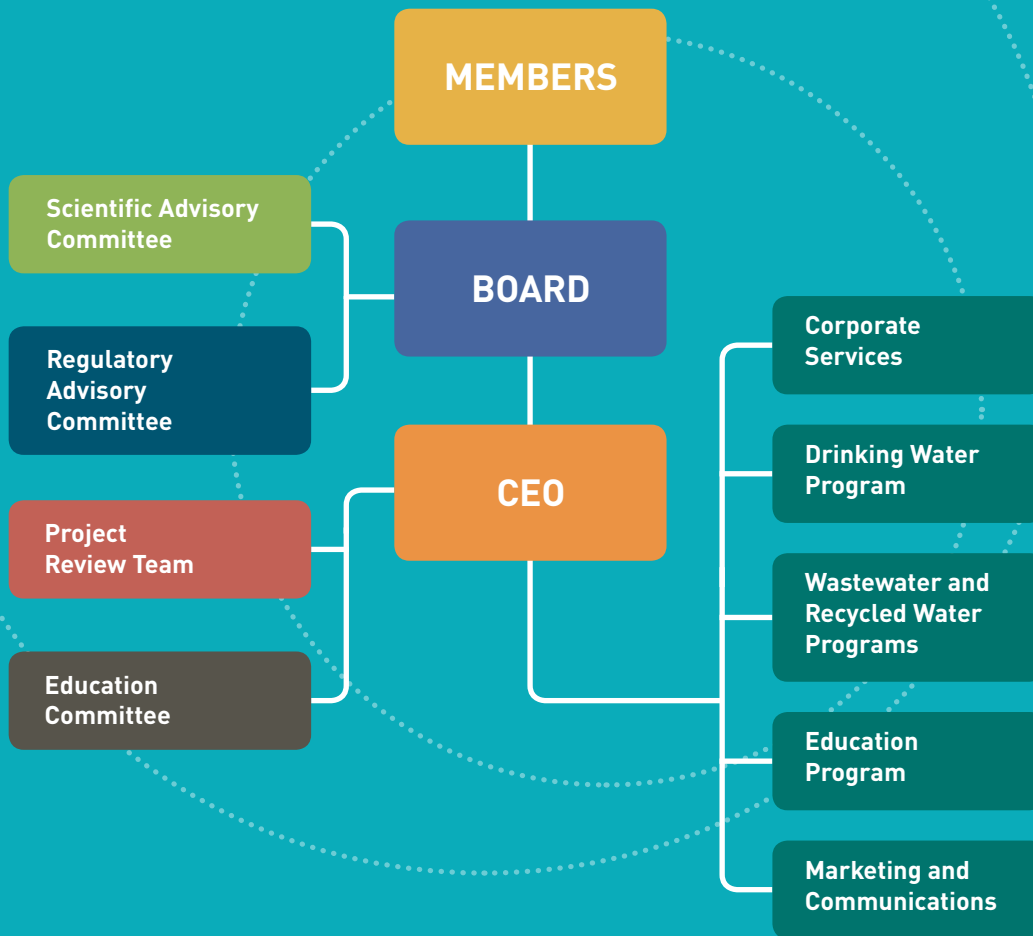
Transfer of project outcomes and new knowledge is actively managed to ensure that projects deliver tangible results that improve and optimise the management of water supplies whilst delivering safe water to Australian communities. The resulting improved operation of Australian water resources deliver additional value beyond public health and cost savings including improved environmental performance, social awareness and reputation of WQRA.

WQRA DELIVERS SPECIFIC BENEFITS TO THE AUSTRALIAN WATER INDUSTRY IN FIVE KEY AREAS

- 1 Reduced risk of water quality incidents** – An improved understanding and quantification of the health and environmental risks associated with water supply and water reuse results in both reduction and better management of unavoidable risks. As a consequence, the likelihood of water quality incidents can be greatly reduced. In addition, a more informed response to threats to water security can be facilitated.
- 2 Improved levels of customer trust** – The increased knowledge base allows clearer and more definitive communication with customers and a steady improvement in public trust of water supply authorities.
- 3 Appropriate regulations** – An improved understanding of risks and system operating characteristics can lead to appropriate, evidenced-based regulations. As a direct consequence, optimal capital investment decisions can be made which target investment in areas of highest risk and avoid unnecessary expenditure on low risk areas.
- 4 Improved infrastructure design and operations** – Better knowledge and understanding of all processes in the catchment to tap sequence can allow development of a range of system management tools. Application of these tools can lead to a reduction in direct operating costs while maintaining a high quality risk management framework.
- 5 Water industry skills** – Support for the education and training of water professionals addresses the impending skills shortage.

WQRA DELIVERS SPECIFIC BENEFITS TO THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY IN THREE KEY AREAS

- 1 Building research capability** – Support for capacity building in the Australian research community enables research groups to establish and maintain a critical mass for water quality and public health research and education;
- 2 Collaboration with Industry** – WQRA's membership offers a vehicle for providing interaction and collaboration with Industry on research related to water quality. In addition to offering financial support, WQRA assists Research Members in coordinating industry participation in Australian Research Council Linkage project grant submissions;
- 3 Assisting Higher Education Students** – By providing funding for postgraduate education and research in water quality related areas, WQRA is able to build a pool of talented young researchers who might be expected to contribute to the Australian Water Community in future.



ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

WQRA's role is to facilitate and coordinate. This in turn requires the coordination of resources among all Member organisations and across a portfolio of 50 to 100 projects at any one time. Notwithstanding WQRA's breadth of activity, the organisation has a very lean organisational structure, employing only eight staff to service four operational areas. The high quality yet lean internal operations (which maximises funding available for research) are supplemented by the external skills of the Members to ensure success in delivery of the research portfolio.

THE WQRA BOARD

The Governing Board of WQRA comprises nine Members:

- Independent Chair
- Chief Executive Officer
- Four representatives of Industry Members
- Three representatives of Research Members

WQRA Board directors are elected by the membership at the Annual General Meeting. The Board represents a broad cross-section of experience and expertise from within the water industry and associated research and regulatory organisations. The Board is supported by two Advisory Committees – the Scientific and Regulatory Advisory Committees – whose roles are to provide the Board with strategic scientific advice in the areas of drinking water quality, wastewater and recycled water. The members of the Advisory Committees are nationally and internationally recognised experts who bring a high level of knowledge and skills to WQRA and its Members.



CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

During its first two years of operation, WQRA has brought together key water research groups and industry members across Australia to conduct targeted, priority research for the water industry. These relationships place WQRA in the unique position of being able to rapidly address current and emerging issues.

WQRA has successfully established a Foundation Research portfolio of more than 50 research projects addressing 15 priority research issues in drinking and non-potable water with a research value of \$50million. This represents a ten-fold leverage on the \$5million of WQRA cash investment. This outcome was achieved through the commitment of the WQRA Member community and external stakeholders and the in-kind contributions of Members and represents a significant investment in knowledge generation for the future.

WQRA has established robust governance processes for internal operations to ensure that all projects are technically sound, have the capacity to deliver and are truly collaborative with Industry, Research and General Members. These governance processes will steer WQRA into the next phase of successful delivery of the research portfolio.

As at October 2010, WQRA has 46 members covering all states of Australia and including Australian water utilities, research organisations/providers, private sector companies, and state and territory government departments. This broad membership ensures that WQRA provides support to and receives input from Researchers, Utilities and Regulators. It is thus able to provide a balanced research portfolio and timely information regarding emerging issues and changes in priorities.

With WQRA's team having been formed, core functions and processes put in place, and the foundation research portfolio established, the WQRA Strategic Plan 2010 – 2015 will be a roadmap for consolidating WQRA's role in the water industry.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Given that significant change has occurred in the water industry over the past decade and that this pace is unlikely to slow in the foreseeable future, it is even more critical to ensure that investment in research is coordinated and a strategy is in place to address emerging priorities in a structured and coherent manner. The WQRA Research Strategy will provide further clarity in relation to the research objectives. Development of the Research Strategy is the first key action to be undertaken in the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

In this context, the Strategic Plan is a vehicle to foster dialogue with both current and potential Members and key stakeholders. That dialogue may in turn refine WQRA's understanding of the dynamic water sector landscape and enable communication to Members and stakeholders of the way in which WQRA will respond to this environment. The actions to deliver the Strategic Plan are detailed in the Annual Business Plan. This ensures that adequate accountability, progress and responsiveness is inherent in WQRA's business.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REVIEW CYCLE HAS FOUR KEY COMPONENTS

Identify: To ensure a clear way forward, the representative Board and Management of WQRA have invested significant effort into determining and articulating the strategic direction for the next five years. This process, which involved a detailed SWOR analysis (see page 18), enabled the identification of emerging issues and business opportunities which were then used to determine the five-year Strategic Aims. The initial draft of the Strategic Plan was distributed to Members and key stakeholders for feedback and subsequent endorsement.

Implement: The Strategic Plan will underpin the WQRA Research Strategy, annual business planning process and will incorporate WQRA's response to emerging priorities whilst maintaining its strategic direction.

Report: The process of engagement in strategic planning is ongoing and involves quarterly reporting to members and delivery of an update in the Annual Report. In addition, individual project and milestone reporting will be provided to Members on an ongoing basis.

Review: Feedback from Members is an integral aspect of strategic planning. All feedback is scrutinised and appropriate actions taken. This feedback may be a driver for amendment of the Strategic Plan.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REVIEW CYCLE

IDENTIFY

- Articulate strategy
- Member endorsement
- Stakeholder engagement
- Ongoing identification of emerging issues and business opportunities

IMPLEMENT

- Actions identified in Annual Business Plan
- Responsiveness to priorities whilst maintaining strategic direction
- Strong governance

REPORT

- Quarterly reporting to Members
- Annual Report
- Project level reporting
- Project milestones

REVIEW

- Regular review of progress
- Ongoing engagement with Members

COMPANY ANALYSIS

A SWOR analysis of WQRA's current position in the Water Industry landscape was undertaken in late 2009 in order to identify ways in which WQRA and its Members could capitalise on organisational strengths, recognise business opportunities, mitigate emerging risks and identify areas for improvement.

WQRA has a number of strengths that stem from the collaborative model on which it is based and the mix of skills brought together across the Membership and within the Company. The core strengths of WQRA are:

- A collaborative company philosophy including a representative Board
- A focus on national issues
- The ability to be flexible and responsive to emerging issues in a highly dynamic industry landscape
- A strong research pedigree and access to an international knowledge base
- Strong internal company capability including excellent staff skills and expertise, robust governance and external brand recognition
- Significant engagement with the wider Australian Water Community

WQRA has significant opportunities to grow its delivery of quality research in water quality in a coordinated and collaborative way with its Members and external stakeholders. These opportunities include:

- A need for a national water quality research agenda for the whole of the water sector
- Government support for WQRA's coordination of research in the area of water quality
- Increasing profile of the water quality aspects of the impact of climate change in the water sector
- Ability to add value to Member organisations through the implementation of research outcomes
- Increased funding from Government and international research agencies
- Expansion of WQRA membership
- Changing number of research centres, including the formation of three new Federally funded Centres of Excellence for water, and the prospect of collaboration
- Greater community interest in water quality

In any business there are risks that must be considered in relation to ensuring long-term sustainability. There are a number of challenges facing WQRA, including:

- The fact that water quality research is often not a priority for decision makers in the water industry and Government
- WQRA Research Strategy not yet fully articulated
- Challenges in determining the value of research outputs and outcomes
- A funding base dependant on its membership
- Competition from other research organisations
- Loss of membership
- Diminution of engagement with Members and key stakeholders
- Some potential for duplication of research
- Lack of national water quality regulations resulting in inconsistency between regulatory bodies
- Ensuring WQRA has mechanisms with regulators and policy makers so that research outcomes are informing decision making

To address these risks, the WQRA approach helps to ensure that research is well targeted, meets key priorities and is not duplicative. WQRA provides a national priority setting framework for water quality research, can deliver coordinated and relevant research that meets the key research needs of a range of stakeholders and links science with regulation and policy.

The Strategic Plan is designed to be flexible such that WQRA is able to respond to a changing environment. WQRA will use this Strategic Plan to maximise the leverage of WQRA's current strengths and assist in positioning the organisation to create and capitalise on opportunities as the challenges unfold, while reducing its weaknesses and mitigating its risks.



WQRA FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC AIMS

While WQRA has successfully established itself as a facilitator of research, it is essential to capitalise on the extraordinary amount of work undertaken during the company setup phase in the first two years of operation. It is imperative that WQRA consolidates and grows as an organisation over the next five years and continues to support the Water Industry through focussed research programs, assistance in building capacity and capability, and formation and maintenance of relationships with key stakeholders.

Although there are many opportunities available for WQRA, it is crucial that human and financial resources are used to gain the best return on investment. Consequently, both opportunities and risks have been prioritised to achieve maximum benefit and to address any core risks to WQRA.

A set of Strategic Aims and associated action plans were developed from the Company Analysis to prioritise WQRA's foci for the next five years and to identify the ways in which WQRA should develop its opportunities and strengths, address its weaknesses and mitigate its risks.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2010 – 2015

BUILDING CAPABILITY

Build capacity and capability for high quality research to support the Australian Water community and facilitate knowledge transfer and uptake of research outcomes to mitigate risk and deliver value/benefits for our Members

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

Provide scientific evidence to underpin the rolling review of guidelines relating to safe drinking water and recycled water

VISION

The trusted provider of scientific evidence needed to ensure safe water for Australians

MISSION

To lead and facilitate high quality and collaborative research of national significance and to promote implementation of research outcomes to address current and emerging public health issues in water quality

ADVOCACY

Promote importance on the national agenda of safe water to the Australian community

COLLABORATION

Develop and implement the research strategic plan to address water quality issues of national significance in collaboration with Members and other key stakeholders

WQRA STRATEGIC ACTIONS

Action Plans were developed through which WQRA will achieve its four Strategic Aims. The detailed tasks associated with each Action Plan will be articulated in the annual Business Plan. Consultation with Members regarding priorities (as articulated in the Research Strategy) will occur regularly through the formal and informal consultation processes established by WQRA.

1 BUILDING CAPABILITY

Build capacity and capability to enable high quality research to support the Australian Water Community and facilitate knowledge transfer and uptake of research outcomes to mitigate risk and deliver value/benefits for Members

Action Plan 1.1 Grow the WQRA funding base

- Actions**
- Increase the number of industry subscribers
 - Campaign for additional government support
 - Expand international investment in WQRA projects
 - Increase the leverage ratio
-

Action Plan 1.2 Maintain WQRA membership

- Actions**
- Continue to provide valued services to Members
 - Articulate the value proposition
 - Continue to deliver excellence in project management
 - Increase the level of targeted communication and engagement with Members
 - Continue to identify and pursue opportunities to leverage Members' funds
-

Action Plan 1.3 Increase WQRA membership

- Actions**
- Obtain the membership of the players in the South-East Queensland water industry
 - Expand Membership targeting all organisations that would benefit through membership
 - Engage with other potential members
 - Grow trust and reputation by provision of high quality and timely advice by WQRA
-

Action Plan 1.4 Maintain and grow world class research capability

- Actions**
- Deliver cutting edge research programs
 - Develop partnerships with global research providers
 - Expand participation on international committees and projects
 - Translate project results into real world applications
 - Publish in international and peer reviewed journals
-

Action Plan 1.5 Develop a pool of appropriately skilled young water professionals

- Actions**
- Grow the undergraduate and post-graduate scholarship and mentoring programs
 - Initiate industry employee research opportunities
 - Promote involvement of higher education students in the water industry.
 - Encourage industry to provide opportunities and financial support for students.
 - Work collaboratively with programs offered by other relevant Water Associations, for example H2Oz.
-

Action Plan 1.6 Implement an innovative and comprehensive marketing and communication strategy

- Actions**
- Define and implement appropriate communication channels with Members
 - Develop a media strategy
 - Target relevant publications and pathways for dissemination of research outcomes
 - Further develop a dynamic and interactive website
 - Increase brand awareness
-

Action Plan 1.7 Maintain and grow WQRA internal capabilities

- Actions**
- Recruit and retain high quality staff
 - Design and implement a practical project management system
 - Ensure solid governance through the implementation of transparent and fair processes
 - Refine the Constitution and Members Agreement to reflect best business practice
-

2 SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

Provide scientific evidence to underpin the rolling review of guidelines relating to safe drinking water and recycled water.

Action Plan 2.1 Influence the development and review of guidelines

Actions

- Obtain representation on the Water Quality Advisory Committee of the National Health and Medical Research Council
- Ensure WQRA's research contributes to decision making
- Participate in international bodies, for example International Water Association and WHO
- Develop formal communication channels with state and federal regulators
- Actively contribute to guideline reviews and development to ensure that guidelines are underpinned by scientific evidence

Action Plan 2.2 Support water service providers to meet requirements of guidelines and regulations

Actions

- Promulgate new or amended guidelines and regulations to water industry
- Coordinate feedback on draft guidelines from Members
- Ensure that research is relevant and timely and is compliant with changing regulations



3 COLLABORATION

Develop and implement the research strategic plan to address water quality issues of national significance in collaboration with Members and other key stakeholders.

Action Plan 3.1 Develop key research questions that address water quality issues of national significance

- Actions**
- Consult with Members and key stakeholders to identify the key research questions
 - Develop a map of the research landscape to identify opportunities and knowledge gaps
 - Establish the research priorities
 - Develop a balanced and targeted research strategy
 - Effective implementation through the WQRA Research programs
-

Action Plan 3.2 Communicate the strategic research plan to stakeholders

- Actions**
- Deliver the strategic research plan to Members and facilitate discussion at Member Meetings
 - Disseminate final plan to key national and international stakeholders
 - Promote continuous engagement with Members and key stakeholders, in particular the water quality and health committees, to ensure the currency of the research directions
-

Action Plan 3.3 Fulfil the objectives of the strategic research plan

- Develop projects consistent with the Research Plan
 - Ensure knowledge transfer of research outcomes
 - Underpin the research programs by strong and transparent management and governance systems
-

4 ADVOCACY

Promote importance on the national agenda of safe water to the Australian community

Action Plan 4.1 Respond to and influence the national agenda to ensure water quality is considered in decision making

- Actions**
- Understand the Australian water research landscape
 - Develop relationships with key decision makers that influence the national agenda
 - Advocate for key water quality health outcomes
 - Deliver new knowledge to the world water community
 - Extend reach and awareness to generate improved understanding of the importance of water quality by all Australians
-

MONITORING AND REPORTING STRATEGIC PLAN PERFORMANCE

To support implementation of the WQRA Strategic Plan, a monitoring and evaluation framework will be implemented. It is important to have a mix of strategic performance indicators to ensure delivery of the strategic targets; however, it is equally important to establish robust operational performance indicators to support delivery of the building blocks to success. The high-level performance targets are articulated in this document, whilst the operational targets will be reviewed and documented annually in the business plan.

Strategic Aim

Key Performance Indicators

1 Building Capability

Build capacity and capability for high quality research to support the Australian Water Community and facilitate knowledge transfer and uptake of research outcomes to mitigate risk and deliver value/benefits for our Members

Number of WQRA scholarship holders that have published research which is of value to Members

Research outcomes are being operationalised by industry and demonstrate improved performance (public health, environmental, cost saving, reputation)

2 Scientific Evidence

Provide scientific evidence to underpin the rolling review of guidelines relating to safe drinking water and recycled water

Recognition of WQRA's participation in the National Guideline development process.

Utilisation of knowledge developed by WQRA

3 Collaboration

Develop and implement the research strategic plan to address water quality issues of national significance in collaboration with Members and other key stakeholders.

Networks are maintained by holding and supporting high quality meetings, conferences and workshops which align with the strategic directions

4 Advocacy

Promote importance on the national agenda of safe water to the Australian community

WQRA is recognised by the water industry and the media for its contribution in the national arena regarding safe drinking water

Members advocate the benefits of WQRA Membership

These measures will be reported on as part of the annual reporting process, with the first report to be completed for the 2011 Financial Year.







LOOKING FORWARD

The WQRA Board recognises that change is occurring – and is likely to continue – in the water sector. While the pressures of drought are easing in many places, the recent experiences across Australia have given a taste of what is likely to be more frequent in the future, as predicted under climate change scenarios. Pressures on water supplies have brought about changes to the way water is sourced, managed and delivered and these changes must have underlying support in relation to government policy, regulation and pricing and innovation. Delivery of this Strategic Plan will place WQRA in a strong position to influence and adapt to these changes in order to be sustainable over the long-term and to ensure *safe water for all Australians*.



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