

Sewerage & Water Environmental Advisory Panel

Initial Value Proposition for Qld Consortium for Advocacy and Research on Contaminants



Background

Concern about contamination from legacy and emerging chemicals is high and likely to grow as community and regulator expectations continue to increase in parallel with the ability to detect trace contaminants. The **qldwater** Sewage and Water Environmental Advisory Panel (SWEAP) committed to collaborate at a State level on current and emerging issues but acknowledged the need to act within the context of national and international initiatives for research, policy and advocacy.

The capacity of individual service providers to respond to these increasing demands is becoming constrained. In 2019 alone, **qldwater** prepared three separate state and federal government submissions addressing emerging contaminant issues on behalf of members using staff and contractors at an estimated cost of \$50,000. Input from members was likely to be many multiples of this figure and is likely to increase unless strategic leadership is focused on this growing issue.

This document describes a consortium subscription approach to establish capacity for the Queensland sector to integrate with, and influence national research and policy.

Opportunities/Drivers

An immediate opportunity was created by the rebid process for the [CRC-CARE](#). This CRC has been a successful national hub for contaminant management since 2005 with a strong legacy in research and policy influence. Water Authorities are being targeted in the CRC rebid with early interest from large utilities including QUU. A broad platform of research and policy is proposed including contamination from PFAS, metals, arsenic, pesticides, and hydrocarbons with links to state Environment Protection Authorities and the national regulatory frameworks. While individual council membership with the CRC is difficult, a consortium approach could allow input from numerous councils to represent the needs of the Queensland sector.

CRC-CARE is not the only opportunity. The [Water Research Centre](#) (UNSW) is currently developing a program to undertake a large-scale audit of chemical and embodied contaminants, including developing quantification methodologies, risk assessments and community engagement. [Water Research Australia](#) is developing an Emerging Contaminants Management System with 11 partners to classify contaminants incorporation into HACCP risk registers. WSAA also have relevant initiatives. These opportunities may provide value for SWEAP members through a consortium that can commit to long-term research and advocacy programs.

Other potential institutions/partnerships for collaboration on contaminants include:

- Advanced Water Management Centre (UQ)
- Water: Effective Technologies and Tools (WETT) Research Centre (RMIT)
- AIMS@JCU
- Water Research Foundation (US)
- Foundation for Water Research (UK)
- International Water Association
- UK Water Industry Research

A consortium may be able to partner with and influence more than one of these organisations by focusing specifically on a portfolio of priorities for contaminants of emerging concern.

Proposal...

...to form a consortium with small annual contributions from partner councils to establish an information hub and partner with national research/policy programs focused on contaminants of emerging concern.

Annual fees estimated as a trial based on cost recovery and will be reviewed after year one when actual costs and performance are clearer. Fees are pro-rated on council size and increase after the initial trial year (see Schedule 1) but do not exceed \$5000 (+CPI) per year for the largest participants. This would fund a resource to establish and administer the hub and a funding pool for membership or research as directed by the Consortium members with advice from SWEAP. **qldwater** would provide in-kind oversight and commit to attracting further resources for the consortium and would assume the risk of multi-year membership(s) and ensuring an annual value proposition.

Value/Benefits for Participating Councils

1. Influence state, national and international agendas
 - Influence/advocate with state decision makers and regulators on behalf of the sector
 - Partner with one (or more) national/international bodies influencing broad policy and research.
 - Single voice for issues impacting Queensland service providers.
 - Link to and influence on emerging research and policy in partnered research organisations.
 - Link with other utilities nationally.
 - Contribute industry knowledge to scientific consensus publications.
2. Focus for further partnership and investment
 - Concentration of effort for new funding and advocacy for Queensland-specific projects and issues.
 - Build new and maximise existing links with Universities & research organisations and students.
 - Investigate access to subscription-based research (e.g. Water Research Foundation) to access further resources.
3. Promote common information
 - Queensland-focused hub with links to relevant research policy and information.
 - Up-to-date summary of current research and policy.
 - Access the state of research relating to contaminants for the urban water industry.
 - Assistance for Standing Group for communications on emerging issues.
 - Provide links to information from institutions both within Australia and internationally that are currently performing relevant research in contaminants.
 - Provide/create common and consistent materials for media releases and communications.
 - Share and promote work and findings coming from the sector and their partnerships with other organisations.
4. Improve access to new resources and contributions at the lowest cost for participants
 - Additional PT resource (Louise Reeves) to establish and maintain the hub and link with SWEAP.
 - Committee of consortium members to determine direction and expenditure.
 - **qldwater** in-kind oversight (Rob Fearon) and assumption of risk of any memberships.
 - SWEAP and TRG advice and input to provide state-wide coverage and positions.

Potential Research Participation

Consortium members will be able to participate in, direct, and contribute to research in the form of Honours, Masters, PhD and other postgraduate research through Australian universities.

- Honours and MSc programs offer potential for short-term well-defined research projects that have a distinct outcome.
- Honours and MSc programs can target specific short-term research requirements without the long-term commitment of funds and time that is required for a PhD project to reach fruition.
- PhD researchers can provide a more experienced input to projects requiring less active supervision and direction but are longer-term commitments accessible only to large organisations or a consortium.

Costs and Risks for Participating Councils

- Annual cost of participation (with choice of opting-in each year depending on value proposition).
- In-kind time of staff to attend oversight meeting to direct work and funds and to provide expert advice on projects and activities.
- Direct influence diluted by consortium approach (versus direct membership with research organisation).
- Risk of single councils or groups of service providers having different view/approach to the position adopted by the consortium.
- Need for confidentiality of information/issues of service providers.
- Proactive approach of the Consortium may increase perceived risks of contaminants or expose the sector to greater scrutiny which may be particularly difficult for small service providers.