

Qldwater Peer Forum — Case Study

Water Industry Worker Program — Network Operations

Implementing Multi-Skilled Network Operations Field Crews at Redland City Council

City Water — Who We Are

Redland City Council's City Water Group is a water and wastewater distributor retailer utility serving a unique dual geography — mainland Redlands Coast and North Stradbroke and Southern Morton Bay Islands — with a diverse asset base across wastewater treatment, networks, and customer services. Treated drinking water is provided by bulk water supplier Seqwater.



~170,000

Residents served across the Redland LGA



~70k Connected Properties

Water metered connections



100 Total FTEs

Across Network Ops, Treatment Ops, Engineering, Compliance and Reporting

Water Supply

~15 ML/year

Delivered to customers

~1,340 km

Water retic mains

Grid & Off grid

Supply from Seqwater

Wastewater

~12.5 ML/year

Wastewater treated

~1,250km

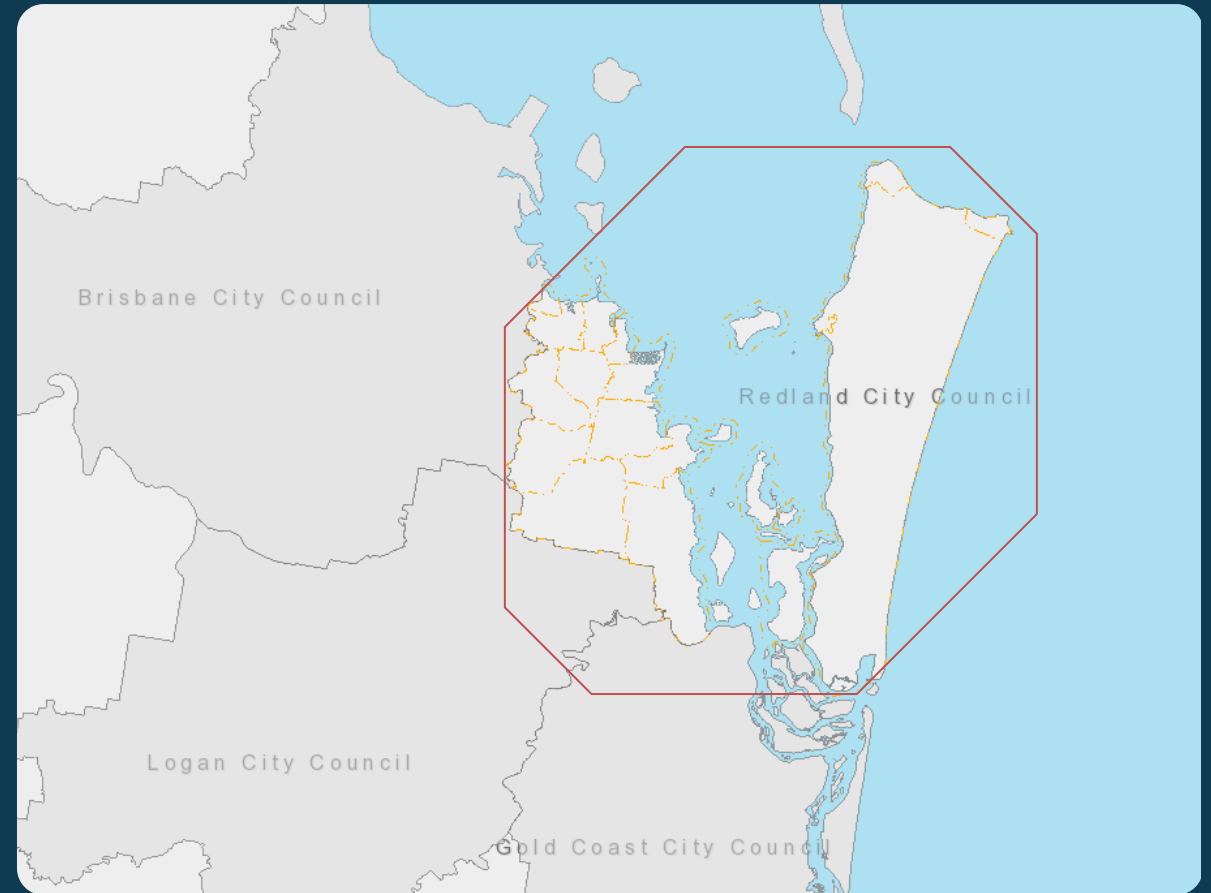
Sewer mains

136

Sewer Pump Stations

7 WWTP

(Mainland & Islands)

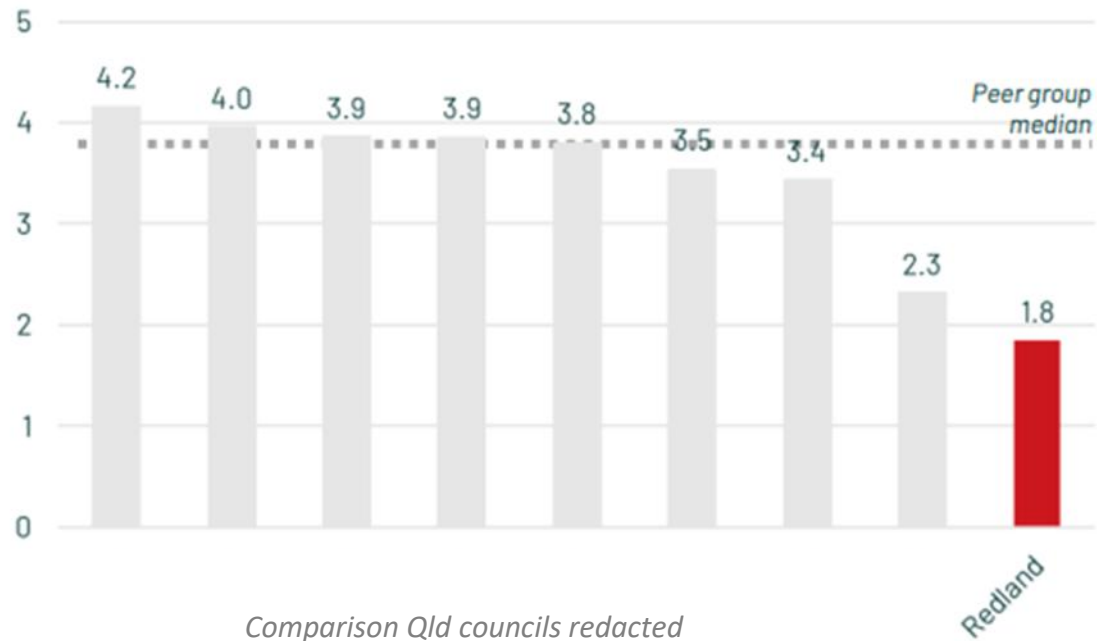


Our Challenges

Redlands City Water has a significant operating footprint, increasing population, aging assets and stretched workforce.

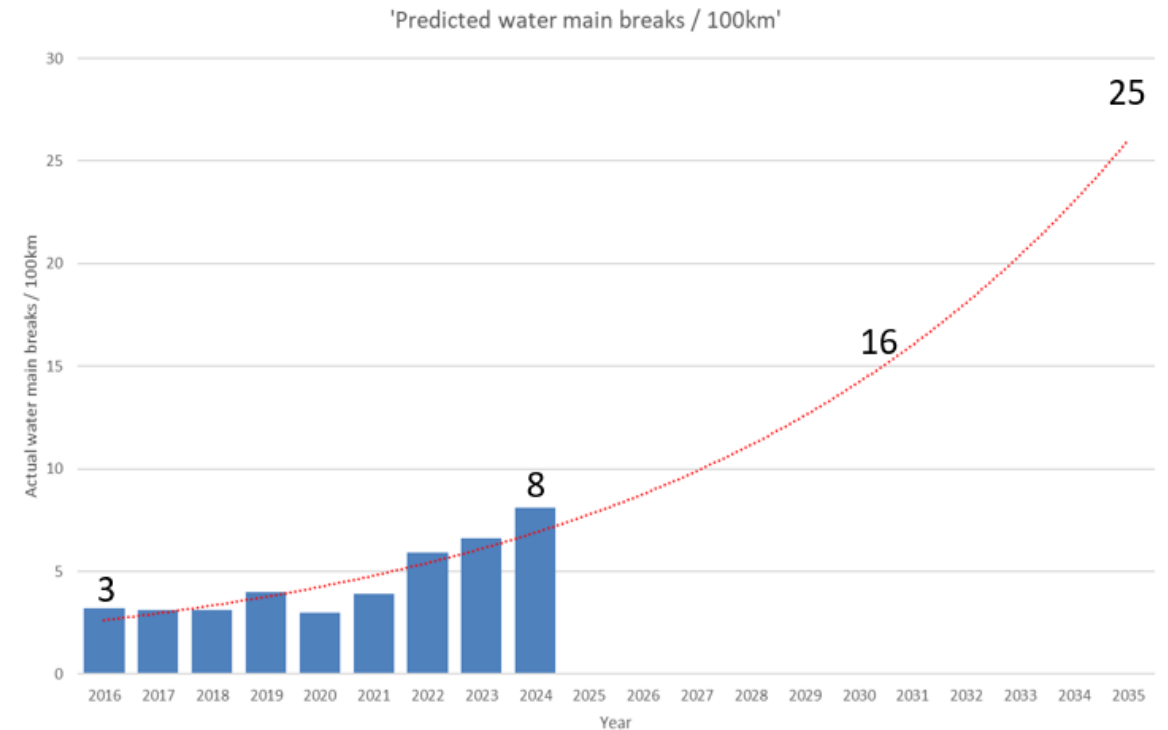
Workforce Scope

Figure Water and sewerage services FTE¹ per 1,000 connections²



Staffing intensity: **1.8 FTEs/1000 connections** vs QLD peer average of **3.8 FTEs/1000 connections** — significantly under-resourced amplified by under qualified staff

Annual workload is increasing



Water main breaks have recorded a **170% increase since 2020** amplified by rapid population growth

The Problem We Were Solving

Siloed teams, no career pathway, and a 25% vacancy rate created operational fragility — after-hours response was the breaking point.

Structural Problems



Three siloed specialist teams — limited cross-skilling

Water Services & Metering, Water Reticulation, Wastewater Reticulation — staff Water OR Wastewater, rarely both.



Only 3 career levels across all field positions

Labourer (Level 4), Water Distribution Operative (Level 6) and Team Leader (Level 7) — no intermediate progression pathway between them.



Identified structural gaps

Teams for water **or** sewer only, no schedule/dispatch function, limited planning, limited SCADA/network monitoring capability in place.



High staff fatigue, absenteeism, no succession planning

Chronic pressure on a thinly stretched team with no clear path to relief.

Consequences



25% vacancy rate — 9 unfilled positions out of 35 FTEs



Over-reliance on contractor spend to fill the gap



Staffing intensity well below QLD regional average — significantly under-resourced



After-hours emergency response severely limited — large or complex incidents required specialist call-out



Breaking point: a single after-hours crew had to cover both water AND wastewater incidents with no cross-training — the system could not hold.



Why WIW — And Why for Network Operators?

The WIW framework was already proven for treatment plant operators and other Qld Councils and utilities;

- **WIW framework:** Industry-recognised, Qld aligned — standardises competency, qualifications and career progression across the water sector
- **RCC's application:** Network operators — field-based Network reticulation crews managing live water mains, sewer blockages, excavation and emergency response across a distributed network
- **Provides attraction and retention benefits:** By providing skills and competences a skills based career framework improves recruitment and retention becomes easier
- **Cross skilling application;** Network operators require cross-skilling across water AND wastewater increasing role capability

The Old Structure

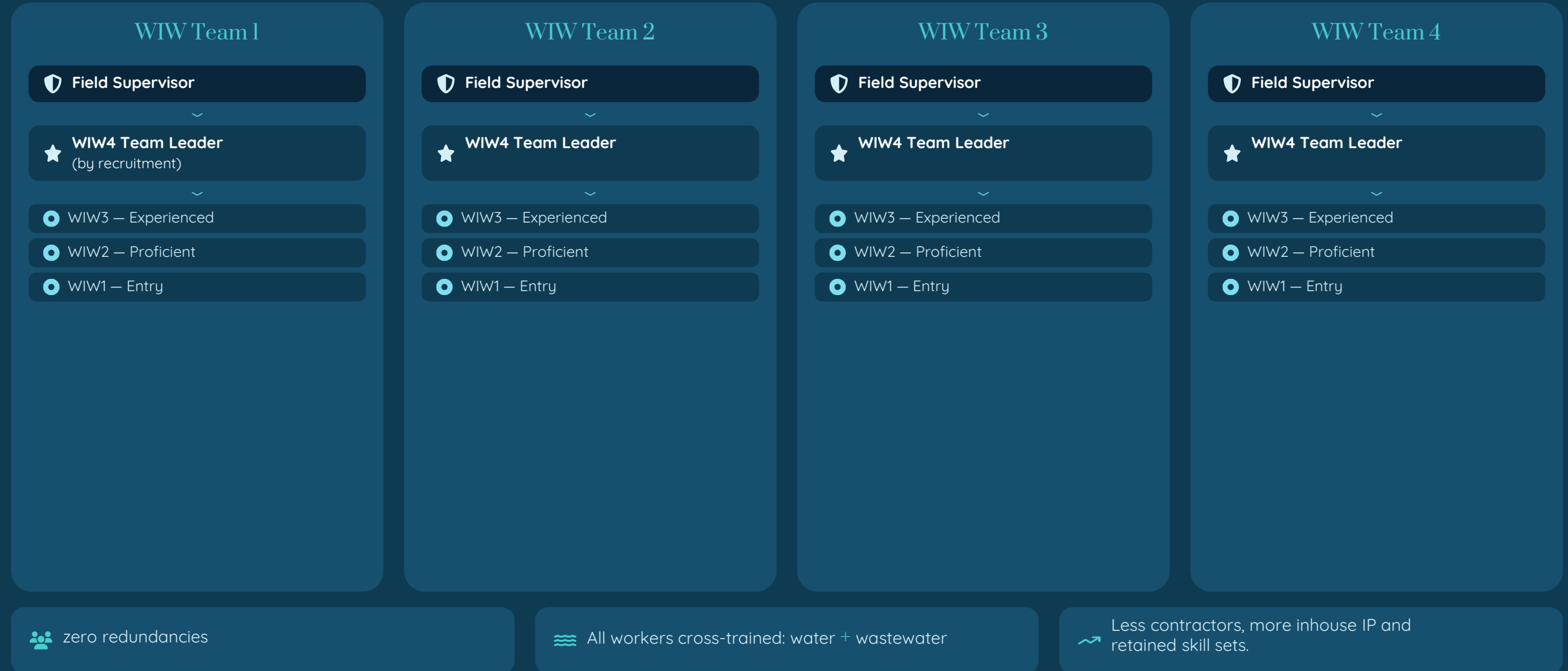
Three siloed teams meant operational inflexibility was baked into the org chart itself.



Progression gap: Labourers (Level 4) had no clear pathway to Team Leader (Level 7) — no intermediate levels existed. All field positions operated in silos: Water OR Wastewater, never both.

The New WIW Structure

Four multi-skilled teams replace three siloed ones — every field worker now trains and deploys across water and wastewater.



The WIW Career Pathway

Four levels of competency-based progression give field workers a visible, achievable career ladder for the first time.

Base remuneration rates



How Progression Works

- ✓ **Tier 1 (WIW1-3):** Competency-based — no vacancy required
- 👤+ **Tier 2 (WIW4):** WIW4 (Team Leaders) and Supervisors (tier 3) filled by recruitment;
- 📅 Assessment available after **12 months** in position
- 🔒 Successful progression **locked in for 24 months** before next request
- 📄 Mechanism: WIW Progression Checklist & Clause 37, RCC Employees' Certified Agreement

Allowances and Industrial Arrangements

A purpose-built all-purpose allowance replaced a tangle of separate entitlements — simplifying payroll and providing workers a transparent, index-linked benefit.

WIW All-Purpose Allowance

\$11,000/yr

Indexed at **EBA rate**

Incorporates: construction · live sewer · asbestos · trailer allowances

Replaces separate allowances that previously applied inconsistently across siloed teams

What the single allowance covers

- Construction allowance
- Live sewer allowance
- Asbestos allowance
- Trailer allowance

EA and Award Integration

-  WIW Framework aligned to RCC Employees' Certified Agreement 2022
-  QLD Local Government Industry (Stream B) Award
-  Reduction of hours from 38 to 36.25hrs/week

Staff Consultation — 2025

- Mostly positive on overall program direction

Primary concerns raised:

-  Remuneration differential between WIW tiers
-  Annualisation of previously separate allowances

Phase 2



EBA 2025 allowance voted in favour addressing remuneration concerns

Training and Learning Pathway

Nationally recognised qualifications, government-subsidised and delivered during paid work hours — training is an investment, not a burden.



Certificate II

- RTO cost: **\$5,500**
- QLD User Choice subsidy: **up to \$4,160**
- Traineeship pathway available

Certificate III

- RTO cost: **\$6,750**
- QLD User Choice subsidy: **up to \$7,520**
- Subsidy exceeds RTO cost

Certificate IV

- RTO cost: **\$7,350**
- QLD Higher Level Skills funding available
- WIW4 (Team Leader) level

Delivery & Portability

- RTO partner: **Trility Training**
- All training during ordinary work hours — no out-of-pocket cost to employees
- Qualifications nationally portable across the water industry

Additional Requirements

MR Licence

White Card

Confined Space

Working at Heights

Breathing Apparatus

High pressure/Jet rodder

Qldwater GGBBT Cards

Implementation Journey

Phased implementation, genuine union consultation, and an expression-of-interest model gave the program credibility with the workforce from day one.



Phase 1 — Late 2024

Foundation & Recruitment

- Initial framework design
- Consultation with unions and team
- Crews hesitant



Phase 2 — 2025

Industrial & Fleet Review

- Implementation of allowances following EA 2025 implementation
- **Fleet design and rollout to support multi-skilled teams**
- Position Description design
- EOIs opened — existing staff invited to transfer to WIW voluntarily



Phase 3 — 2026 Onwards

Full Operations & Ongoing Development

- Implement geographic workforce spread
- Ongoing training and development across Cert II-IV pathways
- Vacancies recruited using new WIW position descriptions
- Increasing workforce to reach sustainable operational capacity
- Implement staggered starting hours to cover majority of reactive works



Participation voluntary — expression of interest, no forced transfers



Union engagement integrated from the outset



Key Learnings and Challenges

The hard part was not the framework — it was the industrial and cultural change; get the allowance structure right before you go live.

✔ What Worked Well

- WIW framework is genuinely adaptable — same structure applies to network operations as to treatment; collaboration with other councils, unions, Qldwater, provided a useful benchmark
- Allowance annualisation: rolling multiple discrete allowances into a single all-purpose payment under EA negotiation attached to new roles provides incentives to sign up
- Competency-based progression *without* vacancy requirement increases attraction for workers
- QLD government subsidies significantly reduce the net training cost
- Zero redundancies created a platform of trust for genuine consultation

⚠ Harder Than Expected

- Compressed salary spread limited perceived financial reward for progression — created early staff concern
- Training fatigue – the volume of certifications across the team resulted in short-term (1 year) shortages across the year putting pressure on stretched workforce
- WIW alone does not resolve structural resource gaps — workforce review and changes underway of increasing FTEs in progress
- Renumeration role compression between WIW3 and WIW4

💡 Advice for others:

Phase industrial relations work before operational rollout; involve unions early; set realistic expectations on the timeline to full multi-skilling.

Outcomes and Next Steps

WIW has given RCC's network field crews a career, not just a job — and demonstrated that the framework works beyond the treatment plant.



100%

People retained
zero redundancies



4

Multi-skilled WIW teams
covering water & wastewater

\$ \$11K+

WIW all-purpose allowance
per worker per year



4

Career pathway levels
WIW1 through WIW4

What We Achieved

- **Structural:** 3 siloed specialist teams replaced by 4 multi-skilled WIW teams covering water and wastewater network operations
- **Workforce:** First credible career ladder for RCC Network employees — WIW 1–3 progression now accessible without waiting for a vacancy
- **Operational:** After-hours response capacity increased — WIW-trained workers can respond to both water and wastewater incidents
- **Financial:** Marginal increase to budgets as rolled up allowances incentivised staff to join WIW offset by insourcing work from contractors
- **Efficiencies:** By increasing multi-skilling people can now work in both water and sewer domains
- **Trust and employee engagement:** No forced redundancies, simplified allowances, career progression and meaningful consultation

Next Steps

- Pursue workforce reviews recommendation to reach sustainable FTE targets
- RCC is open to sharing PDs, framework materials and documentation with Queensland councils considering network operator WIW programs

Thanks and appreciation

Mandy Murchison (Service Manager Network Ops) - for leading the lion share of this work

Sam Peters (Principal Operations Advisor) - who created RCC WIW framework

Sharna James (Workforce Training Coordinator) – Sourced and coordinated all required training

Melanie Baines (HR business partner) – Employee engagement / change management

Tarnya Lowe (Service Manager Workforce Relations) – for timely and sound EA negotiations and advice

Qld councils and people we reached out to and provided their advice

Redland Network Ops team providing management with your trust and collaboration

Qldwater for the basis of the WIW framework and opportunity to present!