

# Guidance on competencies for operators within drinking water treatment systems

## Background

The Queensland Water Skills Partnership (the Partnership) was created in 2011 to address critical skills needs facing the urban water industry in Queensland. It extends the work undertaken through the Water Skills Formation Strategy (SFS) which commenced in late 2009 supported by the Department of Education and Training and hosted by qldwater. In 2014, the Partnership was supported by 36 organisations including 34 existing members, SunWater and Seqwater. The Partnership convenes an Industry Leaders Group to coordinate the development and progress of various projects.

In June 2011, the National Water Commission (NWC) appointed Government Skills Australia (GSA) to create a “framework for the certification of operators in potable water treatment facilities” (the Framework). The Framework was developed over a nine month period and included an extensive consultation process. It received strong industry support, especially in Queensland, where improving access to skills and appropriate recognition and career paths for experienced operators is seen as a crucial for managing drinking water quality into the future.

The Framework project report and “proposed national certification framework for operators within drinking water treatment systems” was released by NWC in December 2012. In the absence of an identified Australian Government “Owner” for the Framework, the national Water Industry Skills Taskforce (WIST), convened by the Australian Water Association, has been given carriage of the Framework, and is leading efforts to see national adoption of this important initiative.

The development of a pilot project to evaluate implementation issues for the Framework had been identified as a priority activity by the Partnership. Approximately 10 operators are expected to be certified by June 2015 as a result of this participation.


Since that time qldwater developed a business case which outlines a number of recommendations to progress implementation of the Framework. The business case demonstrates the need for a mandatory certification Framework in Queensland, acknowledging that certain issues, including appropriate funding support for small and remote providers, must be resolved before a mandatory approach can be considered.

## Memorandum of understanding

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between qldwater, WIOA and DEWS was signed in November 2014. This MOU contains a number of principles agreed to by all parties. The agreed principle most relevant to this guidance document is that any operators certified as part of the pilot program (or certified following completion of the program in 2015) will be recognised by the Department of Energy and Water Supply as “Certified Operators” for a future fully implemented certification program for a period of five years from initial certification.

## Departmental position on Competency

Whilst the Department does not mandate competencies for water treatment operators, the Department considers the employment of



appropriately qualified operators for drinking water treatment systems best practice.

The actions of operators have a direct impact on the quality of drinking water provided to consumers. Operators with appropriate competencies have the skills and knowledge to manage drinking water quality and identify and respond to water quality hazards and incidents to ensure the protection of consumers.

Based on the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, the Government Skills Australia Proposed National Certification Framework 2012 and departmental knowledge of the extent and type of drinking water treatment processes within Queensland.

The Department considers that, at a minimum, all service providers should ensure their operators have achieved a Certificate II level qualification from the National Water Training Package, with Certificate III qualification from this package being the preferred qualification for operators who are managing conventional treatment systems. The Framework provides a more detailed approach to qualifications, individual competencies and continuing professional development for operators including the timeframes proposed for achieving certification and employer support required to maintain that certification. The department supports this approach and commends it as a sound basis for workforce planning for operators.

The Department, through the MOU, has committed to working with qldwater and other industry representatives to consider options for full implementation of the Framework. This guidance may be reviewed as negotiations progress.

Contact a dedicated Contact Officer or email [drinkingwater.reporting@dews.qld.gov.au](mailto:drinkingwater.reporting@dews.qld.gov.au) to receive further information.