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Information sheet 4

The role and purpose of the Project Reference Group

What is a Project Reference Group?

A Project Reference Group (PRG) is made up of key stakeholders that assist the Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCM) process in developing a workable long term urban water service strategy. The PRG facilitates community involvement in identifying problems and evaluating solutions.

The role of the PRG

Stakeholder input is required for the IWCM process to achieve its objectives. The PRG provides this by encouraging discussion, debate and consideration of a wide variety of views and opinions. The key function of the PRG is to guide the IWCM process towards a solution that best meets community and customer expectations and needs.

Essentially, the PRG will:

- Provide input on all existing and potential issues that affect the community relating to provision of the urban water service over the next 30 years
- Help identify suitable options for managing these issues
- Evaluate and compare scenarios built from mixes of options on the basis of their social, environmental and economic impacts (refer to Information Sheet 6)
- Review the evaluation and comparison of scenarios in the IWCM Strategy in order to determine the preferred scenario to recommend for adoption and implementation by the water utility.

Involving the PRG throughout the IWCM process encourages local ownership and maximises the broader community acceptance of the IWCM outcomes. It also promotes transparency and public accountability.

Who should be on a PRG?

The PRG should represent a cross section of the community and foster ownership of the process across the utility and community. In broad terms, members should represent groups that are involved with the urban water service issues and the options and scenarios used to find solutions to the issues.

Membership of the PRG also includes urban water service related representatives from the utility, local council(s), relevant State Government agencies, technical advisers and usually a consultant.

Apart from technical and government members on the PRG, representation can come from the following interest/community groups:

- Environmental
- Indigenous community
- Water service customers
- Catchment management
- Property developers
- Local industry and business



Duties of PRG members

- Should be reasonably available to attend meetings and workshops
- Should prepare for the meeting by reading material that is distributed in advance to ensure they understand what will be discussed at the workshop and are prepared to make decisions
- Are encouraged to participate in discussions during the meetings by expressing their opinions, giving comments, suggestions and feedback on any matter relating to the IWCM process and documentation
- Should present information representing their group, not just their own opinion
- Should support the consensus of the majority of the PRG
- Should respect confidentiality (if required) of matters discussed in meetings
- Should confirm the accuracy and integrity of minutes of meetings
- Should disseminate information and outcomes from the meeting where possible.

The workshops

PRG members must not be asked to undertake the technical aspects of the study. Technical work is the role of the consultant and/or utility. The PRG members are there to provide stakeholder input to the process and to represent the wider community. Technical aspects of the IWCM are put to the PRG for discussion, consideration and comment. This takes place during three stages of the IWCM process.

PRG members should be provided with the agenda and report(s) before each meeting. Prior to the first workshop, the consultant and/or utility should prepare a draft IWCM Evaluation, covering background information and descriptions of the urban water service issues.

PRG Workshop 1

This workshop is about issues. The objectives are to:

- help the PRG understand the IWCM process
- outline the roles and responsibilities of representatives
- summarise the draft IWCM Evaluation findings, particularly the IWCM issues
- identify any other PRG related IWCM issues and discuss urban water service targets, including levels of service.

Concerns or uncertainty about targets, including levels of service, may require a separate PRG workshop.

The consultant and/or utility then complete the IWCM Evaluation. The issues are compared to work being done already or formally adopted by the utility, by developing the 'business as usual' scenario. The consultant (and/or utility) then prepares a list of all technically feasible options to address remaining issues not covered by the 'business as usual' scenario.

PRG Workshop 2

This workshop is about considering options. The objectives are to:

- consider the list of all feasible options to address the remaining issues
- remove any options which are not considered to be locally suitable (short-listing)
- identify relevant community objectives that can be included in the comparison of full scenarios ('traditional' and 'integrated') if a Detailed IWCM Strategy is developed.

Short-listing of options provides for removal of options, which after careful consideration, are clearly not locally suitable, not relevant or are not financially justified on their own or when compared to other options to solve an issue on the basis of social, environmental and economic considerations.

As the final cost of a scenario, reflected in the Typical Residential Bill (TRB), is highly relevant to the water service customers, options with high costs should be further considered, especially where they are required only to address issues related to targets or agreed levels of service that are not essential for the local water utility. Such options may need to be reviewed to see whether the related issue and target are essential or if they could be reduced or removed. Undertaking this step prior to formally developing the preliminary scenarios can help in keeping the final cost of the service (TRB) more affordable.

The consultant/utility then bundles sufficient short-listed options into scenarios to address the remaining

IWCM issues. Not all the available short-listed options will normally be required when building scenarios. No set number of scenarios is required, as long as the IWCM process is followed and at least two 'integrated' scenarios are developed if a Detailed Strategy is undertaken. The number of scenarios needed to address the remaining issues relate to the type of issues and type of short-listed options available. Consideration should be given to preparing a 'simplified' scenario if there will be no new significant capital works within the next ten years. Use of this scenario only requires the development of a Simplified IWCM Strategy.

PRG Workshop 3

This workshop is about scenarios. The objectives are to:

- look at the IWCM scenarios that have been developed using the short-listed options and confirm that all the IWCM issues are addressed (Simplified and Detailed IWCM Strategies)
- consider the additional benefits of the full scenarios based on community objectives if a Detailed IWCM Strategy is developed
- review the full scenarios if a Detailed IWCM Strategy has been developed and rank them to show the best scenario - the one that addresses the issues and provides the best overall social, environmental and economic outcomes.

No comparison is required with the 'business as usual' or 'simplified' scenarios.

In addition to these PRG workshops, other meetings may be needed for the steering committee and/or Government agencies on specific matters.

Duties of the PRG convenor

- organise the PRG workshops
- ensure the agenda is prepared and sent to all members before the scheduled meeting
- ensure that all relevant material for the meeting is provided in advance to all PRG members
- ensure that minutes of completed workshops are taken appropriately and a draft is distributed to PRG members before the next meeting
- ensure that the meeting flows smoothly and focuses on the items listed on the agenda
- ensure the timeliness of the meeting
- ensure that the meeting venue is convenient and accessible
- ensure opportunity is available for every member present to express their opinion.

DWE recommends that all PRG meetings are independently facilitated to maximise the opportunity for each member to contribute.

Further information

For further information, or to discuss any aspect of the Integrated Water Cycle Management process, please contact your nearest regional Water Utility Officer of the Department of Water and Energy. Contact details can be found on the 'Contact Us' page of www.dwe.nsw.gov.au. For more general IWCM inquiries or information email watercycle@dwe.nsw.gov.au.

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