



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Joint Select Committee on Protecting Local Water Utilities from Privatisation

Supplementary questions: Riverina Water County Council

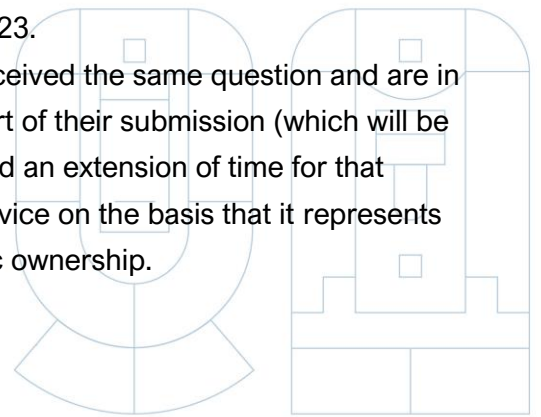
1. How is Riverina Water harnessing new technology to improve the quality of its water supply (e.g. treating high turbidity water)?

- In 2021 Riverina Water commissioned a state of the art 55 megalitre per day water treatment plant that treats water from the Murrumbidgee River. The treatment plant was designed and constructed using lamella plate technology for its sedimentation process, optimising turbidity removal. The Lamella Clarifier is a type of sedimentation tank that uses a series of inclined stainless-steel plates to separate solid particles from liquid. The lamella plates are arranged at an angle to increase the effective settling area while reducing the footprint of the overall plant. Lamella separator where its treatment has a high concentration of suspended solids as is often the case with water being sourced from the Murrumbidgee River, particularly during peak flow or flood events.
- Riverina Water continues to stay abreast of advancements in microbial water treatment requirements, such as the National Health and Medical Research Council's introduction of health-based targets within the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. This has resulted in additional planned infrastructure technology, such as ultraviolet treatment to provide additional microbial water treatment barriers.
- Other more technical actions include:
 - Acquiring, developing and maintaining internal skills and capabilities of water treatment plant operators, technicians and engineers
 - Strategic relationships with specialised and trusted vendors with proven industry performance
 - Encouraging self-learn and professional development of technologies and maintaining a watching brief of new/emerging technologies.
 - Technical conferences and workshops
 - Professional associations: WSAA, NSW Water Directorate, networking with other LWUs
 - Attracting and retaining staff with strategic, tactical, and operational capabilities who collaborate together eg. convergence of corporate IT and operational IT staff systems and staff roles
 - Using proven fit-for-purpose technologies to support business and operational decisions that's within organisations' capabilities
 - Promotion of continuous improvement in business and operational systems
 - Establishing and maintaining relationships with regulators and co-regulators associated with raw water sourcing, treatment and delivery of potable water, for example, NSW DCCEEW and NSW Health

- Undertaking a digital upgrade of Riverina Water’s analogue telemetry system, including current Remote Telemetry Units (RTUs), digital radios, new digital radio repeaters. Improvements include:
 - greater communication reliability and communication diagnostics
 - increased data bandwidth allowing more online instrumentation, monitoring, and controls
 - ability to remotely programme/reprogramme and update firmware of RTUs via digital radio system
 - Data and digital radio transmission encryption
- Implementation of remote online instrumentation at remote facilities:
 - Water quality characteristics during critical stages of the water treatment process, reservoir storages and distribution system
 - Accurate flow and volume measurements for example, electronic magflow meters
- Advancements in operational and water quality data management systems
 - Remote online data entry with data validation
 - Maintaining single point of truths for example. reduce data duplication and version control issues.
- \$22M solar and battery project to reduce costs and emissions involving Riverina Waters headworks facilities to source raw water, treat and pump potable water in Wagga Wagga

2. Do you believe county councils are more vulnerable to privatisation, and what specific legislative protections against privatisation might a county council require?

- Riverina Water has a view that our status as an existing stand-alone County Council places us (and all County Council’s created via a Proclamation) at increased risk of privatisation. This is due to the independent status of all County Council’s. That is to say, we are not interlocked or have any operational linkages to our four constituent Councils. Our operations stand-alone (mostly speaking as there may be some County Council’s that have service level agreements with some of their constituents.
- However, the case of Riverina Water (and as we understand it) we can be dissolved by the Governor of NSW on the advice of the Minister for Local Government (refer Section 383 of the Local Government Act 1993).
- In this regard, the relevant legislation should be amended to afford all County Council’s the protections provided to Sydney and Hunter Water in 2023.
- Riverina Water further notes that Goldenfields Water received the same question and are in the process of obtaining legal advice which will form part of their submission (which will be lodged after 22 February 2024, due having been granted an extension of time for that reason). Riverina Water lends its support to the legal advice on the basis that it represents the best interests of retaining County Council’s in public ownership.



3. Do you support a community service obligation (CSO) funding model for local water utilities? If so, why would this be preferable to other funding models?

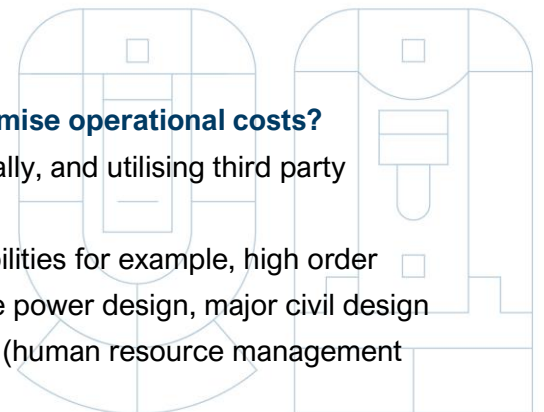
- Riverina Water has successfully supplied our community with safe, reliable drinking water at the lowest sustainable price for the past 76 years independent of any direction from the NSW Government to use a CSO funding model. There is no need for a CSO funding model for local water utilities. and with the protection afforded to Sydney Water and Hunter Water, being extended to the remaining 92 LWU'S in NSW there should be no need to consider a CSO model for LWU's.
- Currently all LWU's set their water and sewerage pricing in accordance with the capital and operational budgets as contained in (their former) Integrated Water Cycle Management Plans. This works effectively as the local councillors are elected every four years based largely on the rates levied, or charges paid to their local Council or LWU.

4. What strategies have you used to recruit and retain utility operators?

- Historically Riverina Water has enjoyed long time serving employees including water treatment plant operators. As this generation of employees retire, Riverina Water is faced with similar challenges to other LWUs. In the meantime, Riverina Water offers the following:
 - Offer good remuneration opportunities.
 - Recognise water treatment plant operators as equivalent to a trade person eg. the position valuations are equal or greater than electrician in salary system, depending on their classification.
 - Offer professional development opportunities in line with Riverina Water's commitment to drinking water quality management systems.
 - 9-day fortnight with rostered weekly overtime on a 4-week basis as being reasonable
 - Favourable Enterprise Award conditions
- Introducing framework to recruit and development water treatment operators internally, as the learn-on-the-job requirements are more extensive compared to other operational roles in the organisation.
- Development and implementation of professional development opportunities for staff
- Recognise the need for appropriate work-family balance of water treatment operators by establishing appropriate critical staff numbers to allow more flexible leave arrangements (especially of summer months)

5. How are you using third party arrangements to minimise operational costs?

- By focusing on maintaining core capability areas internally, and utilising third party arrangements in areas of:
 - Inability or difficulty to internally fulfil core capabilities for example, high order industrial automation programming, high voltage power design, major civil design and construction, specialised strategic planning (human resource management



systems), management of corporate/administrative/financial and data management systems

- Functions/activities that are not considered as core functions to be maintained, such as:
 - Pest control
 - Air conditioning maintenance
 - Facility cleaning
 - Fire and safety equipment and facility inspections.
- Riverina Water are utilising third party arrangements in specialist areas that can be difficult to source and retain in-house. These specialist consultants or contractors work in conjunction with our staff to help facilitate specific outcomes, while building the internal capability of our existing staff. This helps reduce future costs by allowing these new skills and knowledge to be utilised in-house on projects that otherwise would have been outsourced.

