

# CASE STUDY

## Water Loss Management – A Regional Hub Approach in Central NSW- March 2024

### The Project

The Regional Leakage Reduction Program is part of DCCEEW's efforts to support a resilient NSW water sector by reducing waste and improving water security. A key project being delivered under the program is the establishment of a Regional Water Loss Management Hub. The hub has been jointly established with the Central NSW Joint Organisation (CNSWJO) and its member councils, to reduce water loss in the region and better embed improvements made. It aims to create a replicable approach that could be utilised elsewhere in the State.

### The Approach

The CNSWJO is embedded in its membership and their communities. It seeks to work in collaboration with other levels of government to optimise its ability to develop and share its deep knowledge of the region and detailed understanding of its communities, their assets and aspirations. The region supports local decision making and decentralised, place based and collaborative implementation.

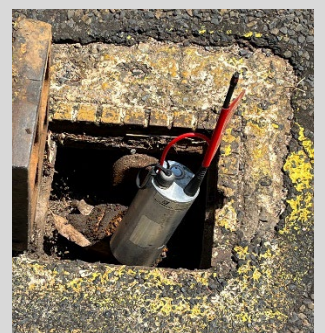
Formed in 2009 the CNSWJO Water Utilities Alliance has been widely recognised as a model for the delivery of Local Water Utility (LWU) services in regional NSW. The Alliance is a voluntary collaboration between the eleven CNSWJO member councils and a water county council. It represents over 180,000 people covering an area of 53,000 sq kilometres with 72,314 water connections and 14 water treatment plants.

Through resource and skills sharing between geographically closely linked LWUs, the Alliance has been delivering demonstrable cost savings and efficiencies for over a decade. The success of the Alliance is based on its governance structure as a team embedded within the CNSWJO framework. It reports to the General Managers Advisory Committee and up to the Board of Mayors. For regional LWUs, regional solutions facilitate fit-for-purpose programming providing opportunities for collective procurement, project and contract management, training and knowledge sharing to assist in the coordination of service planning and delivery to satisfy regulatory requirements.

Leveraging previous work by the Alliance in Water Loss Management (WLM), DCCEEW has worked closely with the CNSWJO and its Alliance members to deliver a funded program that meets the needs of councils depending on the level of their WLM maturity.

A Project Steering Committee including DCCEEW stakeholders has met weekly providing the forum to discuss project risks, quality, shared learning and opportunities and budgeting and procurement as required. Where councils are experiencing unprecedented resource constraints, this forum has enabled a more flexible and targeted approach to the program delivery. Funding has been delivered to the areas of greatest need while providing opportunities for other related DCCEEW water efficiency programming to be optimised facilitating outcomes for both the state and councils.

Through this collaborative approach, lessons learned from the program rollout are informing future DCCEEW water efficiency program design and policy. It has enabled fit-for-purpose programming and the design of tools to help regional councils based on their WLM maturity not on assumptions made by state agency staff. It has been adaptive and designed to embed and sustain WLM in councils' business as usual operations.



## The process

Commencing with a water loss management maturity audit, each councils' respective strengths and weaknesses in management approaches, and supply network infrastructure, has been identified. This work has led to a range of initiatives being delivered across pressure management and reduction, bulk metering, leak detection, training and data improvement.

The need for a regional resource was identified early in the project to assist councils to assess existing equipment, data management systems and to determine what is needed to improve WLM on a case-by-case basis. A Project Control Group including representation from the project technical team and operational staff from participating councils has met fortnightly to guide project work on the ground.

It is evident that an ongoing regional resource to assist with data management and monitoring and the implementation of other demand management initiatives is needed. This is in line with the CNSWJO region's multi-source approach to water security.

## Enduring Change

Where work has been done and funding provided in the past to save water through better WLM, the benefits have not endured. This has a multiplicity of root causes where capacity building, leveraging existing frameworks like Integrated Planning and Reporting supported by accountability informed by good data have been identified as the pathway to embedment of change.

This project seeks to build on a council's maturity by providing a 'wedge' with tools including an accountability framework that will ensure this maturity is sustained and grows despite changes in personnel and resourcing.

## Shared Value

### Value to the State

- One entity to deal with experienced in regional projects and offering a compliant procurement and contract management framework delivering cheaper pricing and a better ROI to the State.
- Through knowledge of council personnel CNSWJO can assure project delivery including altering internal timeframes to manage councils' capacity to engage.
- A collaborative approach with DCCEEW enables funding targeted to where it is needed by councils building maturity and embedding knowledge, systems and training to create a 'wedge' to sustain growth in maturity.
- One entity to deal with, CNSWJO, experienced in facilitating regional projects enabling better buy-in, value for money and outcomes.
- Tools fit-for-purpose for regional councils and with potential for state-wide roll-out.
- Ready access to on-the-ground knowledge and experience to inform state government policy, methodology and program design in water efficiency.
- Implementation of water efficiency technology and systems at a time when councils are resource constrained making new initiatives challenging to progress.
- Media opportunities for DCCEEW and the Minister to promote the water efficiency message
- Water savings and associated energy and cost savings are achieved.

### Value to members

- Asset management outcomes including better distribution system knowledge and asset condition.
- Better efficiencies including from improved data collection and management enabling more targeted response.
- Increased understanding of system water and energy.
- Water savings and associated energy and cost savings are achieved.

