

President's Column



Martin Smith

When I joined the Board in 2006 a membership survey at the time showed clearly that the members were very pleased with the Association's activities around knowledge sharing, technical and membership support, training, networking and conferences, etc. One area where further attention was required was in the leadership and advocacy space. To what extent have we addressed this expectation?

The rebranding to *Water New Zealand* has considerably aided our ability to be recognised as giving leadership on the best use of our water resource. We still have some way to go to be seen as the pre-eminent organisation in New Zealand occupying this space in accordance with the stated purpose of the Association.

The Board now has procedures in place to develop policy positions, consult with membership and agree policy so we can represent the Association's views when advocating for water matters. It is a pleasure to read the Letters-to-the-Editor in *Water*. It wasn't very long ago that I perceived a high degree of apathy with only a small vocal few being heard and not a Letter-to-the-Editor in sight.

Whether the issue is volumetric charging for water, receiving water quality, flood risk management or governance arrangements in the water sector, we are now stepping up and letting each other know our views. Most importantly, this debate is informing the Association's policy positions so that we and the officers are better informed and able to advocate in more considered ways on behalf of members.

If you feel the policy positions or strategic direction of the Association are not aligned with where you think we should be heading, remember that the democratic foundations of the Association are firmly in

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place. The nominations for Board member elections open on 9 July 2010, providing you the opportunity to be at the sharp end of governance in *Water New Zealand*. It is an exciting place to be!

Another sign of an energised and engaged membership is the very well supported conference programme over these past 18 months. Thank you for the support. During this period we have not been watching and waiting for change to be imposed on us but rather are engaging with stakeholders, including central Government, to influence future directions around water governance, allocation, quality and other matters.

The April 2010 Board meeting was the first time for many years that the Special Interest Groups (SIGs) submitted their annual work plans for the Board's review and ratification. It is one of the signs that our SIGs are engaged and thinking about how they can facilitate their members learning, continuous improvement and the search for innovation step-changes.

The Water Services Managers' Group meeting in Napier in April was very successful with 40 people attending. The Service Providers Forum second meeting in Wellington in May was also well attended with a resounding request from the attendees for the Forum to continue. The Senior Executives Forum has set a forward work programme including metering and tariffs, biosolids including standards and reuse, leakage, investment and investment certainty, independent high quality regulation and procurement.

I will be tabling five areas of constitutional change at the AGM:

- i. The formal name change to *Water New Zealand* which has been advised previously
- ii. Clarification of the Association's prestigious life and honorary membership

categories following the recent review work by the Awards Committee

- iii. A proposal for the term of Board members to be extended from two to three years so that we can get better continuity of representation at the Board table
- iv. Clarification of the process for election of future Presidents. The person taking up the office of President needs a period of time to make arrangements for the two-year term commitment and hence it is necessary for the President-Elect to be determined around six months prior to the AGM. At the April 2010 Board meeting the Board agreed that Clive Rundle is now President-Elect and it will be my pleasure to support him in that role for his 2010–2012 term
- v. Securing the position of the President and President-Elect. While stating that Presidents shall serve for two year terms, the rules also state that elected Board members are elected for two year terms. These are contradictory in that a President could be voted off half way through his/her term

More details of these proposed changes will be supplied to members.

The shape of the recovery from the global financial crisis has been talked about in many terms including the dead-cat-bounce, bath-tub or double-u. For me it seems we are now in the second leg of the double-u. As Auckland local government and water governance changes take time to roll-out, low levels of development investment continue in the medium term. In the meantime councils consider the implications of the transparency, accountability and financial management amendments to the Local Government Act.

It is a real concern that we have to continue to keep our product and service delivery people busy by engaging in the Australian economy and further afield when we know there is a significant amount of deferred infrastructure investment that has to be addressed here in New Zealand. The longer we have to keep arranging for New Zealand expertise to be working on temporary assignments offshore or declaring there is no work for them in New Zealand in the medium term, the higher the likelihood they will not be returning to New Zealand for a decade or more. That is a loss we cannot afford. ■

**Martin Smith,
President, Water New Zealand**