



AUSTRALASIAN BIOSOLIDS PARTNERSHIP

A proposal for Subscribers/Members

Australian Water Association Limited

January 2009

Proposal

This proposal is for funding support to help sustain the Australasian Biosolids Partnership (ABP), with a financial contribution as described in the attached letter.

The ABP is an Australasian project, designed to place the beneficial use of biosolids on a sustainable footing across the region. In 2007, initial funding for the initiative was sought from major stakeholders from the water utility and regulatory sectors. Thirty-four organisations across the region made the commitment to support the ABP for three years.

This proposal seeks to present to those utilities and regulators not yet part of the partnership, the opportunity to join the ABP. It is hoped that by bringing together a diverse and changing industry to tackle projects and issues that would be difficult for any one organization to address.

Summary

The ABP resides with the Australian Water Association (AWA) that has taken responsibility for implementing the partnership, and its agreed business plan.

The objectives of the ABP are to:

- Support public engagement with respect to the sustainable management of biosolids in both Australia and New Zealand
- Support the Australasian water industry on technical components of biosolids management

These objectives will be achieved by:

- Interaction with national organisations to promote awareness of biosolids management
- Engagement with stakeholders to help them make informed decisions regarding biosolids management
- Development of community engagement tools for subscribers
- Connection with international organisations similar to the ABP to establish a global network of those interested in the sustainable management of biosolids
- Formation of relationships with technical experts from across Australia and New Zealand
- Provision of contacts for technical advice on biosolids related concerns/issues.
- Linkages with companies working in all areas of biosolids production and management
- Maintenance of the ABP Website – both the subscriber and public sites
- Provision of legal support and tools for subscribers
- Advocate for the regulatory consistency throughout the region
- Liaison with relevant CRCs and research organisations

Why should my organisation support the ABP?

- Opportunity to play a key role in the future of biosolids management in Australia and New Zealand
- Demonstrate your organisation's commitment to operating in a sustainable manner and willingness to interact with the community you serve.
- Membership gives you access to the ABP website which is great source of tools and resources on many aspects of biosolid management
- Opportunity for your biosolids staff to build and engage with a technical support network and enhance their own knowledge.

How is the ABP to be Funded and What Does it Cost?

To provide resources to engage a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties on a federal basis, provide technical support to members and to continually update and maintain the ABP website requires in the order of \$200,000 per year. By spreading the costs across the Australasian water industry the contribution from individual organisations is quite small, with \$10,000/year for three years being the upper limit.

The amount being sought from your organisation is set out in the covering letter.

Why not make the commitment to enable this most important service to the Australasian water industry, to other stakeholders and to the general public to be implemented with strength?

Please act on this request for membership and the associated financial support by responding favourably as soon as possible.

Context

There are enormous social pressures on beneficial uses of biosolids in Australia, New Zealand and internationally. Australia and New Zealand currently produce approximately 360,000 dry tonnes of biosolids annually. Approximately 35% is applied to agricultural land and 30% is disposed of in landfill, the other 35% is used in composting, forestry, land rehabilitation or incineration. Currently, the average cost for biosolids management is in the order of \$300/dry tonne, which equates to about \$100m per year. Victoria alone has a stockpile of some 1.7 million dry tonnes of biosolids, which suggests that about \$500m is needed to address management of that stockpile alone.

Those beneficial uses which are currently well accepted must be maintained, as well as investigation undertaken into novel technologies and other alternatives.

The cost of managing biosolids in Australia and New Zealand will increase dramatically if fit-for-purpose uses (e.g. application to agricultural land or composting) are derailed by misinformation. Being forced to provide the highest quality biosolids to meet ill-informed public perceptions has the potential to double the cost of managing biosolids. If this situation became the norm in Australasia then the annual operating costs for biosolids management could increase by \$100M. This, unfortunately, is the trend in the USA and Europe.

Background

A Biosolids Steering Committee working under WSAA and VicWater funding, proposed that the Australian and New Zealand water industries establish the *Australasian Biosolids Partnership* (ABP) for effective public engagement of all stakeholders in the production, management and use of biosolids in Australia and New Zealand.

As the ABP's primary purpose is to support the water industry in informing both the industry and the wider community on appropriate biosolids management, The Biosolids Steering Committee recommended that ultimate ownership should reside with the water industry. It follows that it is the responsibility of the Australasian water industry to provide the majority of the financial support to enable the ABP to undertake the components required to achieve its purpose.

The two key objectives of the ABP are:

- Support public engagement with biosolids management at a national level in both Australia and New Zealand
- Support members of the Australasian water industry on technical components of biosolids management, including management and updating of the website and facilitating technical information transfer across the industry and to the wider community.

In 2007, the Australian Water Association (AWA) took up that proposal and secured funding support from 34 industry organizations to make it a reality.

The thirty four subscribers, representing utilities and regulators that made a three-year commitment (2007 – 2010) to support ABP are:

Barwon Water	Central Highlands Water
Coliban Water	Department of Environment & Conservation, WA
Department of Human Services, VIC	Department of Sustainability and Environment, VIC
Devonport City Council	DLA Phillips Fox
East Gippsland Water	Gippsland Water
Gosford City Council	Goulburn Valley Water
GWM Water	Hobart City Council
Ipswich Water	Lower Murray Water
Maroochy Water	Melbourne Water
North East Water	PDS Pty Ltd
Power and Water	SA Water
Rodney District Council, NZ	South Gippsland Water
South East Water	Sydney Water
Sustainability Victoria	VicWater
Vic EPA	Watercare, NZ
Water Corporation	Westernport Water
Western Water	Yarra Valley Water

The aim of the ABP is to develop a program to effectively engage stakeholders in biosolids management to achieve sustainable use of biosolids from an environmental, economical and social perspective.

The benefits to the water industry are enormous. More informed regulators, maximised benefits from nutrients, improved perceptions and acceptance from all stakeholders, efficient use of industry resources (across NZ and Australia), low environmental impacts, more effective community engagement strategies, a biosolids knowledge base (the world's most comprehensive) and network of biosolids experts.

The key component of the ABP is the website www.biosolids.com.au, launched in April 2008. The website is structured with a section open to the general public and a section that is password-protected and is available only to Subscribers. The information on the website was developed by the industry steering committee and is already extremely comprehensive. The website is regularly updated with material including technical data, latest research, case studies and other reference material from Australasia and internationally. This will ensure the community and all stakeholders have easy access to factually correct information to help the water industry to provide informed input into biosolids management projects in their community. It will also identify key spokespersons, outline a community engagement framework and provide a toolbox for community engagement.

Ultimately, the ABP will protect water authorities and the general community from poor decisions by poorly informed biosolids managers. Such decisions could lead to one bad experience with biosolids, ending with a detrimental impact on the biosolids management industry in Australia and New Zealand.

ABP Governance and Management

As the ABP's primary purpose is to support the water industry in informing both the industry and the wider community on appropriate biosolids management, the ultimate ownership resides with the water industry that provides the majority of the financial support to enable the ABP to undertake the many components of the program outlined above.

It is important to demonstrate regulator and government support at both federal and state levels and maintain close liaison with relevant research and academic institutions whose research outcomes will be critical in establishing the technical credibility of biosolids management approaches. The AWA has a Biosolids Specialist Network with several hundred members and holds a biennial Biosolids Specialty Conference. In addition, AWA's Water Education Network provides an important, complementary function for both the industry and the wider community.

The ABP operates under the guidance of an Advisory Board, which includes representatives from key participants including AWA, WSAA, regulators, research organisations and comprises:

- Mark Beaufoy – Partner, DLA Philips Fox, Melbourne
- Philip Broad – Technical Business Services Manager, Treatment Operations, Sydney Water
- Paul Darvodelsky, PSD Ltd, NSW
- Allen Gale –General Manager, Technical Services, Goulburn Valley Water
- David Hill – Manager, Communications and Community, Melbourne Water
- Stephen Lansdell - Project Officer, Water Industry Team, Water & Catchment Unit, EPA VIC
- Michael Makestas - Principal Wastewater Process Engineer, SA Water
- Mike McLaughlin - Chief Research Scientist, CSIRO Land and Water; Professor in School of Earth and Environmental Sciences
- Nancy Penney – Biosolids Strategist, Water Corporation
- Tom Mollenkopf – Chief Executive, Australian Water Association (ex officio member)

Allen Gale was appointed Chair of the Advisory Board. The ABP Project Manager is Andrew Speers, National Industry Programs Manager, who leads, manages and implements national industry programs for the water sector, specifically advancing biosolids management in the direction specified by the Australasian water industry. Andrew is assisted by Ann Hinchliffe, Industry Programs Officer and the broader AWA team.

Business and Funding Structure

The funding model is a subscription structure and is based on the water industry providing the greater portion of the operational funding, with contributions from regulators and research institutions. Regulator support is also important to demonstrate support for the ABP and some state government departments have already committed support for the ABP. It is recognised that research institutions are net seekers of funds rather than providers, but nominal financial support is desirable to demonstrate commitment to the ABP.

By spreading the costs across the Australasian water industry the contribution from individual organisations is quite small, with \$10,000/year for three years from larger utilities being the upper limit. To put the contributions into context, the sum of money being asked from each organisation is small in comparison to the many millions of dollars for water utilities for effective sustainable biosolids management. In addition, support is being sought from federal and state governments, research institutions, commercial contractors and equipment suppliers.

Further Information

If you have any queries regarding this proposal, contact Andrew Speers on 02 9467 8426 or aspeers@awa.asn.au or Ann Hinchliffe on 02 9467 8418 or ahinchliffe@awa.asn.au