

## **Craig McIlroy**

Craig McIlroy has been a leader of the New Zealand's engineering and water sector for the best part of 45 years and stands out from his peers for consistently championing not only customer improvements, but sustainable community outcomes and skills and capability development in our sector. While he has earned respect for successfully delivering many of New Zealand's largest wastewater and water quality capex projects, he also deserves recognition for spearheading many innovative new approaches that go above and beyond, push the boundaries, foster collaboration and are lifting our industry's capability. He was recognised by Engineering NZ through being made a Fellow in 2016.

Craig has been a member of Water NZ for most of his career, and has specialised in water since 1988 after first gaining broad private sector and Local Authority experience across civil engineering and project management. He has spent a substantial portion of his career at Watercare and its predecessor organisation including roles as Watercare's Strategic Planning Manager and later Wastewater Manager. During this time he managed planning, investigations, consultation and consenting for some of the largest and leading-edge wastewater and water projects in the country, including:

- Leading the early 1990's Auckland drought response and the extensive public campaign to reduce water usage, which ultimately led to the concept of developing another water source for Auckland – the Waikato River - and the implementation of Project Waikato
- Becoming “the face” of Wastewater 2000, Watercare's five year technical and public consultation project which resulted in the removal of the 500ha oxidation ponds and return to the Manukau Harbour; consenting for the restoration of Puketutu Island in an innovative win-win solution of monofilling stabilised biosolids; and the creation of foreshore reserves through the largest ever wastewater project in New Zealand (\$450M Project Manukau)
- Managing the development of a wastewater masterplan for Auckland based around the two main treatment plants at Mangere and Rosedale, and identifying the need for the Central Interceptor (to reduce csos from the Orakei Main Sewer to the Waitemata Harbour and bypass aging assets, Hillsborough Tunnel and Manukau Harbour siphon) and the Northern Interceptor (to divert sewage flows from the Western Interceptor to the Rosedale WWTP).

Despite many challenges in the relationship between Water NZ and Watercare in these earlier years, Craig remained a stalwart supporter of the association and provided a conduit into the organisation, contributing to the delivery of technical papers and encouraging his team and others across Watercare to support the association. His commitment to contributing to the wider industry never wavered and a good example of Craig's dedication was his support as a Watercare executive to the first response to the Christchurch Earthquakes.

In 2013 Craig joined Auckland Council to head up a struggling stormwater team, and since joining has shown exceptional leadership by fostering collaboration across the wider council family of organisations (“leaving your organisational badge at the door”) and building a world class Healthy Waters organisation within Auckland Council. Craig has put stormwater on the map and established international recognition for Healthy Waters, with Auckland Council being named as the leading utility (across Water, Wastewater, Stormwater and Electricity sectors) as part of the 2016 WSAA benchmarking.

Craig also stands out for his ability to conceptualise and lead visionary community-focused programmes. He provided the genesis, guidance, oversight and direction of the award-winning Safeswim programme which is currently in place across Auckland. Craig championed the establishment of this programme as a strategic way to expose the limitations of Auckland's ageing water infrastructure and present it in a way that resulted in public recognition and support for a targeted rate to improve water quality. It is this “stand up and be counted” leadership style and Craig's challenge to traditional approaches that has led to in excess of \$400M in additional funding being secured to improve water quality across the Auckland Isthmus. This has raised

national awareness of water quality issues and the tools and approaches are being shared and applied nationally and internationally.

During the Auckland water crisis in the mid 90's Craig also led an innovative community education programme using "Robert the Frog" to indicate the lifecycle of water from ware supply dams to the receiving environment. Still to this day, you can see the imprint of "Robert the Frog" on stormwater inlets in Hobson Street, Auckland. Craig is now working on innovative ways to educate and capture the public's hearts and minds for climate change adaptation strategies, New Zealand's next major challenge for our industry.

Craig also works tirelessly to grow capability and skills in our sector and mentor the next generation of leaders. Under his tenure at Auckland Council Craig has ensured the Council's platinum membership of Water NZ has continued and that Auckland Council supports many association events. He has supported his staff to fulfil key roles on the association, including past presidents and a large number of staff who contribute to many committees and SIGs including the Technical Committee, WSGM, WUA, Stormwater Group and Young Water Professionals.

Craig also actively supports post-graduate research in collaboration with the universities. He has overseen the development and implementation of a graduate programme alongside staff development. He has realigned thinking on corporate responsibility by masterminding ways to provide jobs for long term unemployed members of the community in socially deprived areas. All of these activities point to a leader who thinks about resourcing holistically across the sector, with a view to long term sustainability and advancement of the industry and community he serves.

Craig's focus on long term sustainability has also transformed Healthy Water's strategic direction and is helping the organisation to look outward and contribute to the sector's overall advancement. Recently his team developed a sustainable outcomes toolkit that can be applied to all projects and businesses. This has been adopted by Ministry for Social Development and endorsed by the Mayoral Forum. In support of betterment of the industry, Craig has open sourced this toolkit for everyone to use and access.

Similarly, Craig has encouraged his teams to contribute to and share tools and resources across many other forums. This includes leading asset management, not just across the Council family but also through contribution to NAMS, the Drinking Water Advisory Committee, Metadata standards development and Water Sensitive Infrastructure Training, to name a few.

Craig's success is built on his ability to cut through traditional management structures, organisational hierarchies and silos to deliver best for customer and industry outcomes. He has adopted many innovative procurement approaches, including partnering and creating collaborative forums that are leading and informing the wider industry.

He continually challenges the status quo to improve customer outcomes across the water sector and brings refreshing blue sky thinking that proactively encourages new ideas, technologies and new approaches to further the industry. Craig has well and truly gone "above and beyond" what could be expected from any water professional to grow our sector and improve water quality. His passion for the industry is inspiring and he delivers this all with a sense of fun and honesty that is uniquely refreshing from a senior water industry leader.

Nominated by: Dukessa Blackburn-Huettner

Seconded by: Steve Couper