

NZWWA SWANS-SIG – Small Wastewater and Natural Systems Special Interest Group

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EDITORIAL

This year SWANS-SIG has been somewhat in limbo, due in part to the Editor and Chairman being indisposed for nearly three months following recovery and rehabilitation after an accident, and due also to lack of opportunity to get the Management Committee together for a one-day planning event. Secretary Ray Hedgland attended a meeting early March with NZWWA staff and Dave McBryde, Chair of the Drainage Managers Group, to discuss SWANS-SIG activities and our relationship with NZWWA. The main issue arising from these discussions was the availability of funding to support the Group's management planning activities and project work. An application was subsequently made to the Drainage Managers Group for financial support to enable the Management Committee to meet in Auckland for a planning day, but in the event Drainage Managers (whose funds are sourced from levees on municipal drainage authorities) could not provide any money. Although the Drainage Managers can use funds for "projects", these need to be related to providing benefits to the supporting councils, and getting the SWANS-SIG Management Committee together for a planning meeting fell outside the scope of "project" work.

SWANS-SIG also asked NZWWA for a grant from the profit made from the very successful "On-site Wastewater Management Workshop" held as a one-day event pre-conference October 2004. Earlier this year NZWWA was significantly restructured and the newly appointed management has pointed out that if we were given the impression the pre-conference workshop was a "stand alone" event we were mis-informed. Workshops, such as ours, are part of the overall conference package so there is no accounting breakdown of individual workshops/streams. We have been assured, however, that the new direction of NZWWA will see, as one of its primary goals, better and more coordinated support for SIGs, including a staff member specifically dedicated to working with and facilitating a SIGs work programme.

In our case this will be Emma Bonner, and she will be supported by the Manager Advocacy & Learning, Peter Whitehouse.

So, at this stage the Management Committee is unlikely to meet in full before the end of this year, and has therefore concluded that there is no need to hold an AGM associated with NZWWA "enviroNZ05" in Auckland at the end of September (28th to 30th). That said, there are a number of papers being presented at the NZWWA conference that will be of interest to members.

The Management Committee wishes to continue to promote the interests of the SIG and would value feedback from members as to any opinions you may have on the direction the group should take, what activities and projects you expect the Group to get involved in, and any other comment on the Group's aims and objectives. For an overview of the Group see details on the Special Interest Groups menu of the NZWWA web site (www.nzwwa.org.nz).

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SWANS-SIG 2004 AGM

This was held on Tuesday 5 October following the workshop. The management Committee's report on activities to date was presented by the Chairman, Ian Gunn (see the group's web site entry for details of the report under "AGM"). The Management Committee appointed from the meeting comprises:

- Jim Buchan, Innoflow Ltd, Auckland
- Peter Carroll, Hynds Environmental Ltd, Auckland
- Robyn Floyd, Auckland Regional Council
- Ian Gunn, Auckland UniServices [Chair]
- Ray Hedgland, Fraser Thomas Ltd, Papatoetoe [Secretary]
- Finlay Mason, Palmerston North City Council
- Dave Miller, Palmerston North,
- Rob Potts, Glasson Potts Fowler, Christchurch
- David Ray, EMS, Hamilton

The main topic of discussion centered around the theme of the on-site wastewater workshop which preceded the AGM. The workshop highlighted a problem territorial authorities were having in approving on-site wastewater treatment plants which currently were not subject to any sort of certification process (such as the procedures for testing factory units for treatment performance under the protocols in AS/NZS 1546.3:2001 "On-site domestic wastewater treatment units Part 3: Aerated wastewater treatment systems"). It was suggested that SWANS-SIG could promote the development of National Guidelines in this area. It was noted that NZWERF, the Ministry for the Environment, and OSW-SIG (the On-site Wastewater Special Interest Group involving manufacturers) had all been looking at proposals for a national field testing programme, but lack of funding meant this had not gone ahead.

The Auckland Regional Council are proposing to establish an expert forum to assess new technologies, and this could assist with such a certification process. Meanwhile, the AGM asked the Management Committee to consider taking a lead in establishing a certification scheme.

It was also pointed out that the performance of small community and cluster treatment systems should not be overlooked.

Greetings were received from a sister group in Australia, NOSSIG (National On-Site Systems Interest Group) who are affiliated with AWA (Australian Water Association), and SWANS-SIG was encouraged to actively communicate and liaise with like organisations overseas.

NATURAL SYSTEMS and SWANS-SIG

Much of SWANS-SIG activity over the past two years has focused on the area of on-site wastewater management. Little activity in the "natural systems" (wetland and land treatment) area of interest of the group has occurred. Those members who meanwhile wish to keep in touch with activities in this topic area should contact the contact the NZ Land Treatment Collective (NZLTC). Their web site (www.ensisjv.com/nzltc) provides the following introduction to this group:

The NZLTC was established in 1989 to support the extension of research into the treatment of wastes and waste products by land application, providing its members with the most recent information on land treatment technology, research and information. The NZLTC works to improve communication to all stakeholders in the waste management industry. The NZLTC is managed by Ensis, formerly known as Forest Research, where land treatment of waste products has been researched since 1978. Many New Zealand research organisations are also involved in land treatment research, most of who are members of the NZLTC.

Land treatment of waste products, as defined by the Collective, includes the application of any waste material to the surface of land, or to wetlands, for the purpose of treating the material by the plant/soil or wetland system in such a way that negative environmental impact is minimised. Waste materials can originate from a variety of sources and include domestic sewage, agricultural and industrial wastes. Application methods commonly used in land treatment systems include spray irrigation, flood irrigation, drip irrigation, rapid infiltration, wetland systems, and biosolids application.

Recently the Collective completed the New Zealand Guidelines for Utilisation of Sewage Effluent onto Land. This was a three year project with the aim of providing practitioners with a resource to help them consider all relevant factors for planning, design, consenting, management, and monitoring of a land treatment system.

NZLTC has an annual conference around March/April each year, the next being in Nelson 2006. Contact for details of coming activities is Technical Manager, John Lavery in Rotorua (E-mail nzltc@ensisjv.com).

EXTENSION to SANITARY WORKS SUBSIDY SCHEME

The Sanitary Works Subsidy Scheme was introduced during 2003 as an initiative by the Government to assist small communities which needed to move from poorly performing on-site systems to a community reticulation wastewater servicing solution. When announced in May 2002 by the Health Minister, the subsidy was to be available at 50% of capital cost of works for small communities of 100 to 2000 populations. For populations 2000 to 10,000 persons, the subsidy would be available on a sliding scale from 50% down to 10%. Funding priority would be given to communities with high measurable rates of water-borne communicable disease, significant health inequalities compared to the population at large, and limited ability to fund their own scheme. The responsible territorial authority was required to match subsidy funding, initially by spreading the costs of their contribution across their whole ratepayer base. Local government objected to this approach on the basis that those communities which had already paid for recent upgrades through their own scheme would then have to subsidise their neighbours. This requirement was then relaxed to enable each council to decide how they would use revenue and financing policy to raise the local matching funds.

The applications for subsidy are ranked according to public health and environmental risk, deprivation index, territorial funding ability and whether any previous subsidy has been provided. A scoring system and weighting system has been devised to assist the ranking process. The deprivation index for a community is on a 1 to 10 scale, 1 being least “deprived”, 10 being most “deprived”. The variables used in compiling the deprivation score relate to income, employment levels, communication (access to phone), transport (access to car), family support (single parent), qualifications, living space and home ownership.

On 25 July 2005 the Prime Minister announced an extension to the subsidy scheme for communities with a deprivation index greater than seven whereby subsidy will increase to a maximum of 90%. The territorial authority area deprivation index must also average greater than seven, with the actual subsidy between 50% and 90% being based on the average of the community and territorial authority deprivation indexes. Helen Clark gave an example of a community able to claim the full 90% subsidy as Moerewa in the Far North District Council area. Moerewa has a deprivation index of 10, and when offered the original subsidy of 50% to implement a sewerage scheme for 1800 population to replace serious failure of septic tank systems, had to decline because of inability of the community to fund the remaining 50% local share of \$1.45 million. It will now only have to find \$280,000.
