The simple fact that you can’t manage what you can’t measure, combined with significant growth in statutory reporting requirements, led the Queensland Water Directorate (qldwater) to create the Statewide Water Information Management (SWIM) project in 2006. Since then, the SWIM system has grown every year and is now used extensively by Queensland urban water and sewerage service providers to report to various State and Commonwealth agencies, and by swimlocal full licensed users to improve internal data management.

Data collected through the SWIM system provides the opportunity for benchmarking, and each year qldwater produces the Queensland Urban Potable Water and Sewerage Benchmarking Report based around a suite of key performance indicators and benchmarking data. Queensland’s eighth water and sewerage benchmarking report using 2017/18 data from 71 Service Providers across the State is available from the qldwater website at http://www.qldwater.com.au/reporting.

According to SWIM Manager, Dr David Scheltinga, what some people may not realise is that the software has broad applicability beyond the water industry. The system is a cost-effective data management tool which is used for integration across systems, which is being used for fleet management, tracking tasks and jobs, and a range of general business functions.

“I was recently talking to one of the independent consultants who does a bit of work with councils who was saying that there is a real tendency to get caught up in evaluating and never implementing systems which cost a small fortune – he’s started promoting swimlocal as a ‘no-regrets’ program they can roll out relatively quickly for immediate gains while they make their minds up.”

“Most subscribers have multiple users with a hierarchy of controls established. The things we typically hear as most valued are the capability for a range of automatic calculations, capacity to build in point-of-entry validation/ error checking, and its overall simplicity of interface, designed for users with limited computing experience.”

Continued page 94
“All up we spend well over $100,000 per year on ongoing development to ensure the system is always able to cope with new software and hardware, as well as the list of ‘tweaks’ and improvements our users pass on,” Dr Scheltinga said.

A major update of the swimlocal software was released in March, with a number of changes around indicator alerting, security, metadata, task alerts and importing functions.

Enhancements to be released for the reporting period commencing 1 July 2019 include a new ‘data entry web-portal’ for SWIM annual water and sewerage data which will allow Council staff from other departments (e.g. finance) to enter data directly into SWIM without having to install the swimlocal software onto their computers. Aside from introducing browser functionality, the change helps subscribers and qldwater members meet their tight end of year reporting requirements by allowing distributed data entry and importing.

“There are currently 34 Service Providers using the full licensed version of swimlocal and an additional four at least signing up for 2019/20,” Dr Scheltinga said.

Contact David at dscheltinga@qldwater.com.au if you are interested in exploring options for your business.

WOMEN IN WATER

International Women’s Day:
Think equal, build smart, innovate for change

On 8 March we celebrate International Women’s Day with a theme fit for the water industry: to focus on innovative ways in which we can advance gender equality and the empowerment of women, particularly in the areas of social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure.

In a recent H2Du0 podcast interview with PNCWA Woman
of the Year Chanin Bays, the Administrative Services Manager for Clackamas County Clean Water Services in the USA called on women to **step up, suit up and show up** and become part of an amazing movement of women making their mark in the industry.

“What we need as a nation is for women to begin dreaming again and to step up and start claiming those moments. We have to find a way to connect to our communities and I really believe that getting more women into the water industry is the game changing idea.”

In Australia, and more particularly here in Queensland, the water industry is facing complex workforce challenges including an ageing employee profile, issues attracting and retaining staff, and general skills and labour shortages.

The Queensland Water Skills Partnership, as the most significant industry-led skills program for the water industry in the state, has set its sight firmly on initiatives to tackle these challenges with a key focus on attracting more females into the industry.

The ball seems to be in motion with data collected for the qldwater 2019 Workforce Composition Snapshot Report due to be released later this year showing a steady increase in females joining the industry. The biennial report shows female representation creeping up from 24.75 in 2014 to 28.2% in 2016 and 36.9% in 2018.

To get a better idea of the people we are attracting, we talked to **Narelle D’Amico**, Branch Manager - Water Services at Bundaberg Regional Council, to hear her story.

**What’s your current role and give us an overview of a general work day**

I started at Bundaberg Regional Council in May 2018. My role is centered around the strategic direction and both internal and external stakeholder management. I work with team members in different branches and sections of business as well as externally to raise the profile of water services in our local community.

I like to think I am a “leader led” leader, which means I like to be visible and go out on site and into the community where appropriate. We cover both the hinterland and the coastal area, so we have a good mix of sites and I enjoy getting to know our people, assets and gain an understanding of the key issues staff deal with on a day to day basis.

**What was your career progression into this role?**

I started my career 21 years ago after completing a degree in Environmental Engineering at Deakin University.

I spent a lot of my formative years working on designing and installing water and wastewater treatment plans, running environmental programs like restoring creek systems, rehabilitating and reinstating wetlands etc. Byron Shire and Hunter Water did a lot of work in transforming their localities whilst I was there, trying to reduce the impacts of urbanisation which causes more runoff and prevents natural infiltration. This is a big problem for our communities and something I really enjoyed working on.

I then spent 7.5 years with the WA Water Corporation in Western Australia, where I gained significant exposure to a variety of people, assets and communities, working in the Pilbara and Kimberley region. Here I worked as Major Works Project Manager for 2 years, Asset Manager for 3 years and finally as Service Delivery Manager for the Northern Region.

The Water Corporation is a statewide business, so from an asset services perspective networking really occurred within the business. I had six peers with similar roles across the state, which was great for support in terms of resource and knowledge sharing.

With my current role in Bundaberg it’s a lot more fragmented with peers spread out across different localities - this is why the work done by qldwater and programs like QWRAP are so important to provide these key linkages and networking opportunities. (Bundaberg Regional Council forms part of the Wide Bay Burnett Region of Councils.)

I also had an 18 month break in between jobs to travel around Australia with my then young family - this provided a great opportunity for our kids to bond with both parents which was an invaluable experience.

**What made you decide to join the water industry – was it something you knew about when you were at school or did something else lead you in that direction?**

The Environmental Engineering Degree that I completed at Deakin University was heavily tailored towards water and wastewater and it had a good technical blend. I was attracted to it because I wanted more field-based employment rather than being an office bound engineer. I liked the
complexity of the service provided mixed with my love for science and environment, so it seemed like a good fit.

**What’s the best thing about being a female in a male dominated workforce?**

I like to think that I bring a different perspective to the table. It’s not that all males think 2D, but I do think females tend to look at the bigger picture with a more holistic view. Our place of work is heavily centered on people and as a female I think differently about people - how to motivate and inspire people. I’d like to think that it provides a point of difference.

When I started at Bundaberg my manager apologised for the fact that there were only four technical females on the team and that the rest of the females were all in administration. But times are changing, and we now have a female graduate engineer, a female technical officer and a female apprentice mechanical fitter.

There is absolutely no reason why females can’t do the job at hand, and as the use of technology gets more prevalent we’ll be able to smarten up our way of working more and more.

**What’s the worst thing about being a female in a male dominated workforce?**

The availability of toilets sometimes! Seriously though, I have found far more benefits than negatives working in this industry, and I have always received great support from my male counterparts.

**What would you say to a young female considering a career in the water industry?**

I’d say don’t be afraid - and don’t be afraid to ask. Be inquisitive and ask for help when you need it. It is an industry that provides multiple platforms for growth and provides a wide range of skill sets in business. Just because you start in one role there is no reason why you should still be there in ten years’ time.

Future employees will be continually developing and growing because of all the opportunities out there.

Water employees are largely Asset Managers - as technology becomes more prevalent it will further drive that need for each employee to be an asset manager in their own rights.

At Bundaberg Regional Council we are currently working on a Continuous Improvement Plan that will see us restructuring an alignment of skills sets. We are focusing our efforts on an electronic works system - it’s all about working smarter and empowering the operators.

We are changing the way we do things, and it’s great to be a part of it.