

SIMON ROBERTS

ECONOMIC REGULATION TEAM LEADER (ACTING) AT CITY WEST WATER

“Australia has the foundation needed to deliver a paradigm shift in water management”

The annual awards of the Australian Water Association, held in early May in Adelaide, promote outstanding work by individuals and organisations in the water industry and recognise excellence and innovation across the water sector.

 CRISTINA NOVO PÉREZ

City West Water’s Simon Roberts won the National Young Professional Award at the Australian Water Association’s National Water Awards for his commitment to driving transformational change in the water sector. Simon received this year’s award in recognition of his commitment to delivering transformational change in the water sector through leading major Integrated Water Management (IWM) projects, such as the Werribee Recycled Water Expansion. In addition to acting in the role of Economic Regulation Team Leader for City West Water, Simon represents CWW on the Western Growth IWM project, which addresses urgent water and development challenges. He has also been instrumental in driving the Our Future Cities program which brings diverse students together to develop in-

terdisciplinary solutions to real-world water and development challenges. In this interview he provides some insight on the value of collaborative approaches to water resources planning and management.

What does it mean for you to receive the National Young Professional Award from the Australian Water Association?

There are so many dedicated, passionate and brilliant people working in the water sector it’s a great privilege to be recognised with such an award. The award really motivates me to continue to try and drive sustainable water management as a professional and as a member of the broader community. I hope to use this platform to continue to raise the profile of water as fundamental to life, but also a key ingredient to creating the cities and communities that we want to live in.

Water management has the potential to offer so much more than affordable and essential water services. By putting water at the heart of our planning decisions we can create healthy waterways and vibrant, cool and green communities. In this way, water can shape the way

our cities look and feel, it can enhance environmental outcomes and provide greater value to the community.

Why is it important to use an integrated water management approach to water resources planning for sustainable and resilient cities?

IWM is about thinking about the whole water cycle and finding opportunities to deliver multiple benefits. As we face pressures on affordability, liveability and climate change, it is important to maximise the community outcomes we deliver as we plan the cities of the future.

Community expectations need to guide where and how we invest. IWM is a process that allows this to happen. It brings together all stakeholders involved in the planning and management of

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IWM brings together stakeholders involved in the water cycle management, to ensure liveability, resilience and sustainability



the entire water cycle, to ensure that we deliver on the liveability, resilience and sustainability outcomes that the community is seeking.

What is your source of inspiration to develop innovative water management practices?

I was inspired to work in water by my university lecturer Professor Tim Fletcher. Tim is highly regarded as an expert in stormwater management and he opened my eyes to the truly fundamental nature of water.

I don't think the community thinks about water management beyond what comes out of the tap and goes down the loo. I know I didn't. Tim changed this by passionately explaining how the way we manage water touches on so many elements of our environment and society.

Just like Tim, I am inspired to borrow from and mimic nature to better manage water in our cities. This is a way to use my skills to leave a positive legacy and still motivates me to this day.

Can you tell us about an integrated water management project you are particularly proud of, and what lessons can be drawn from it?

At City West Water I helped deliver the Werribee Recycled Water Expansion – including securing \$2,000,000 in Victorian Government funding.

This project replaces water that is currently extracted from the Werribee River with recycled water for supply to several public and private users, promoting urban cooling and greening, and bolstering tourism in Melbourne's west. New supply sources like this can help protect our rivers by restoring environmental flows or providing opportunity for local Traditional Owner groups to seek access to river water for cultural flows.

This project encapsulates the challenges and opportunities of integrated water management. It's a great example of how multiple stakeholders can work together to deliver better win-win outcomes.



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To what extent does collaboration across the water sector and beyond play an important role in shaping sustainable, liveable cities?

One of the strengths of the water sector is the willingness to share and support each other. No-one is trying to out-compete each other, which means we can focus on taking what works in one area of Australia and applying it in another. Every town and city is different, but through the individual efforts of water corporations to create sustainable, liveable cities and the sharing of the lessons learned, we all benefit.

What do you see as the main challenges ahead for a sustainable water future, in Australia and beyond?

Translating strategic intent into action is a major challenge. Australia has the foundation needed to deliver a paradigm shift in water management. This will allow us to tackle the wicked challenges of meeting water security needs, improving liveability, managing rapid growth, maintaining affordability, and tackling climate change.

Australia is well positioned to adopt innovative solutions that elevate the benefit we derive from water planning and management. I'm very optimistic that we can do this by partnering with our community, listening to their needs, putting all options on the table and empowering them to have a say in the path forward.