

Presidential report by Dr Heidi Snyman, as outgoing President of the Water Institute of Southern Africa (WISA) on the 27th May 2009

Responding on progress on the theme for 2008/9

“Keep on keeping on - We have work to doWISA and the Water Sector in 2008/9”

By

Dr Heidi Snyman, BSc (Hons), PhD, FWISA, MIWA, Pr.Sci.Nat
Director: Water Centred Knowledge
Water Research Commission
Private Bag X03, Gezina, 0031, South Africa
heidis@wrc.org.za, Tel: +27 12 330 0340, Fax +27 12 331 2565

Members of Council and the Board, WISA Members, Distinguished Guests, and Friends. It is an honour to deliver this outgoing presidential address to you. It was a pleasure to serve as President of the Water Institute of Southern Africa for the 2008/9 term. I have personally grown tremendously and for this I will always remain thankful and dedicated to WISA.

This year has been a turbulent year for the water sector and WISA. Never before has the subject of water been in the media and the boardrooms to the extent that it was in this year. In the past the subject of water was only on the fore during extreme climatic events such as droughts and floods. I found it interesting that ordinary South African citizens are speaking about pollution, water quality, operation and maintenance, water demand management, water availability.

In this address, I aim to reflect on what we set out to do a year ago and set the scene for the inauguration of our new President, Dr Kevin Pietersen. On 20 May 2008, I indicated that we need to focus on the internal business systems and reassess the strategic direction for the next few years.

I think we can be proud of our achievements of the last year:

Business and Governance Improvements

WISA has experienced tremendous positive growth in the last few years and we are fulfilling our mandate more effectively.

In 2007/8 we grew to such an extent that our resources barely-barely coped. This is evident in the financial figures showing a loss of R 213 000 in the 2007 financial year versus a profit of R 2.4 million in the 2008 financial year. It was therefore important to stabilize the organisation to ensure sustainability while maintaining the growth. The Board and Council have successfully implemented good governance policies and procedures. The board and council have already approved several policies and procedures and Special Projects and Conferences are now financially ring fenced. The WISA board also received training on the responsibility of board members.

Some areas that requires attention

Our incoming president will certainly elaborate more on the short to medium objectives in his inaugural address. However, I would like to spend just one minute on areas feel should still receive attention:

- We currently have 53 local authorities members and we should try to get the other local authorities to join WISA as well.
- We should try to focus on aspects such as Integrated Water Resource Management in more depth even through formal linkages.
- We should work on the formalisation of the IWA SA/IWA/WISA relationship.

Celebrating achievements of the past year

Membership and activity

The individual paying WISA members grew from 1484 to 1647 – an increase in the steady growth rate of 6% in the two years prior to the 2008/9 term to 11% growth in the 2008/9 term. The student membership (free subscriptions) grew from 508 members to 570 in the 2008/9 term. WISA now represent 2228 individual members and 330 organizations (including 38 patron members) in the water sector. This significant representation is recognised by the sector leader, government and the media.

We have seen impressive national and international activities to serve the water sector and our members. These include:

Flagship events such as the:

- The biennial WISA conference held in May 2008 at Sun City attended by a record 1250 delegates. At this conference, 164 papers were presented at 9 parallel sessions with 26 workshops and 70 exhibitions.

Supporting national initiatives such as:

- Formulation and implementation of the Blue Drop, Green Drop certification programme and increasing laboratory standards through the Standards and Certification Portfolio Committee
- Ensuring a turnaround in training and education through the Education, Training and Youth Development Portfolio Committee
- 2nd Drinking Water Quality Management (DWQM) Conference. 11-13 May 2009. Feathermarket, Port Elizabeth
- Serving as an Implementing Agent for the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (now the Department of Water and Environment)

Organised specialist events such as:

- 2nd Specialist Wastewater Conference: 'Small Wastewater Treatment Systems'. 19-20 February 2009. Gateway, Umhlanga Rocks, KZN
- 3rd WISA Annual Appropriate Technologies Conference & Exhibition. 20 & 21 October 2008. Indaba Hotel. Fourways, Johannesburg,

Supporting international projects and events:

- International WISA Membrane Technology Conference 2009. 13-15 May 2009. Spier, Western Cape. The WISA Membrane Technology Division (WISA MTD) in association with the European Membrane Society (EMS)
- 10th International Water Distribution Systems (WDSA) Conference 2008. 17-20 August 2008. Kruger National Park – The first WDSA conference to happen outside the USA.
- International Water Resource Association (IWRA) which we support by managing the administrative office including the financial systems, membership management, conferences and governance. The IWRA expressed their appreciation to WISA and we have a very good working relationship. The WISA CE attended the 13th IWRA Congress in September 2008 in Montpellier, France as a guest of the IWRA.

Increasing membership benefits

- ECSA - Reduced membership fee:

ECSA now recognises WISA as a Voluntary Association by the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA). This means that WISA Members registered with ECSA will qualify from this year for the ECSA annual fee for members of VA's (voluntary associations). The annual fee is currently R800 less than the annual fee for persons who are not members of a recognised VA.

- CPD points:

WISA is now able to accredit conferences, training courses, meetings etc, in terms of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and award points.

- Trade missions and international exhibitions:

WISA supported the South African water sector at World Water Week, 17-22 August 2008, Stockholm, Sweden as it organised an exhibition stand for the South African Sector. Besides WISA and eWISA there were 12 SA organisations that exhibited being DWAF, DPLG, Magalies Water, Rand Water, Umgeni Water, Bloem Water, Sappi, KPMG, WIN-SA, BIGEN, WRC & SAME.

Mission to Zaragoza Water Exhibition and Madrid, Spain. 7-11 Sept 2008. WISA assisted in organising the trade mission for a number of WISA members.

5th World Water Forum, Istanbul, Turkey, 16 – 22 March 2009. WISA organised an exhibition stand for the South African Sector and gave logistical support to the DWAF.

- e-WISA

The e-WISA is fast moving to achieve the vision to “effectively contribute to training, education, capacity building and information transfer, related to Water in South Africa” with the amount of visits to the eWISA site now over 150 000. eWISA is the mechanism to fulfil WISA’s purpose which is capacity building and to raise the profile of WISA members. The eWisa Municipal Assistant™ has now been implemented in the Western Cape as well. As part of the implementation of the Municipal Assistant™ system in 17 Local Municipalities in the Western Cape, 24 staff members from various Local Municipalities and Overberg Water were trained.

Branch and division activities

There has been a very impressive list of activities at the branch and division level of WISA, including quarterly meetings, workshops, field visits and, annual general meetings and seminars and technical tours. The branches and divisions of WISA constitute the heartbeat of WISA and I personally want to thank the champions for their dedication and hard work.

Vision 2015

The Board with the assistance of Ceenex, completed a new strategic framework called WISA Vision 2015. This strategic design clearly spells out seven (7) Strategic Action Plans or Strategic Projects which will now be implemented.

1. Improve Corporate Structure Effectiveness – This strategic action plan aims to close gaps in accountability, responsibility and conflict of interest. It focuses on improving and simplifying the WISA corporate structure in order to align it with organizational strategy, size, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency as well as governance requirements.
2. Drive Membership Quality Growth – Existing members need to be recognized and rewarded for staying with WISA and new members need to be excited about joining and staying. This strategic action plan has two components: (1) enhance membership benefits and (2) to excel membership growth.
3. Cultivate Donor, Sponsorship and Volunteer Support - This strategic action plan focuses on harnessing additional sources of income and resources namely Donations, Sponsorships, Aid and Volunteer Support by means of systematic targeting and executing planned initiatives.
4. Excite Brand and Visibility - WISA brand strengthening and elevated visibility is about building a widely recognized brand, visibility and strengthening its corporate image.
5. Produce Deliverables and Operations - This strategic action plan guides the role, function and activities of the Operations function and includes planning, design, delivery and review of

conferences, seminars, colloquia, workshops, discussion groups, exhibitions, technical tours, etc. It also delivers program and project management services as Implementation Agent in such a way that it balances member benefits against minimizes competition with its members.

6. Strengthen Corporate Governance - It is of vital importance that volunteer organizations ensure continues prudence with regard to “total” corporate governance, especially working with third party contributions. This SAP focuses on the four elements of governance: Strategic, Constitutional, Contractual and Legal.
7. Optimize Sourcing - WISA needs at all times to ensure that it can account for all its sourcing efforts. This action plan includes the activities relating to outsourcing and use of consultants.

South African Young Water Professionals programme

The aim of the Young Water Professionals programme is to fulfill the present and future needs of the water and wastewater industries, which requires the continuous development of a workforce which is both adequate in size, capable in skills and strong in leadership.

This joint initiative between the young professional’s programmes of WISA and the IWA and will form **the** national network for young water professionals who are under the age of 35 or who have graduated in the past five years and who contribute to the water and wastewater sector through study, work or practice.

It is my great honour to introduce the 1st WISA Young Water Professional President later in the agenda.

Acknowledgements

Before I conclude – I need to acknowledge a few individuals:

May I take this opportunity to thank Junior, Wallace, Dot, Diedre, Melissa, Maimboti, Evelyn, Merle, Manoko, Helen and Solly for your passion. I have yet to see such a dedicated, hard working team. Your tireless efforts and professional manner in which you serve the water sector is truly an inspiration.

A special vote of thanks to the Ceenex team their huge contribution in formulating the WISA Vision 2015.

Lastly, thank you to the Board, Council and dedicated individuals. This is a voluntary organisation dependent on the generous contributions of individuals and institutions – you give your time voluntarily and without expecting anything in return. THANK YOU....Each of you have made a significant contribution to the water sector.

I wish to thank my mentors, family, friends and colleagues for shaping my career. Thank you for your understanding and support over the years. Thank you to my employer the Water Research Commission for donating my time to the sector in this manner.

Closing remarks

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, it is important that we remain focussed in our task ahead. WISA is in good hands moving forward.

Keep on keeping on – we have work to do.....

I thank you.

Dr Heidi G. Snyman

President of the Water Institute of Southern Africa (WISA) 2008/2009