

**AUSTRALIAN  
WATER**

ASSOCIATION

# **ANNUAL REVIEW 2024-25**







## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Australian Water Association acknowledges the Traditional Custodians across Australia, where we live, work and play, for their deep connection to our precious waters and land. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and the ancestors who have cared, protected and nurtured Country for many thousands of years.

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## Message from the CEO

Every year brings milestones, but some years feel like a turning point. FY25 was one of those years. It was a time of completion and new beginnings. It was a year of delivering on Strategy'25 with purpose, while laying the foundation for our next chapter.

What stands out most about the year just past is the balance we struck between delivery and renewal. We stayed focused right through to the end, creating value for members through events, programs and networks, while also investing in the strength and resilience of our organisation. This Annual Review reflects that story – a year of momentum, renewal and transition – and I'm proud to share it with you.

### Delivering for members

Our members remain at the heart of everything we do, and in FY25 we continued to broaden and deepen the member experience.

Ozwater'25 was a standout. With over 1,700 delegates, 200 exhibitors and an outstanding lineup of speakers, it again confirmed its place as the premier event for our sector. It captured the diversity, energy and innovation of the water community. Members told us the chance to connect, learn and share stories made this one of the most valuable events yet.

Across the country, local events offered vital connection. With more than 11,000 registrations, and growing participation from women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and new members, we saw inclusion expand and the community continue to renew itself.

We also broadened access to knowledge. Our weekly national newsletter, Source, remained the trusted place for updates, Current magazine reached more readers, and the Water e-Journal opened new opportunities for students and early-career professionals. These platforms remind us that knowledge, shared openly, is one of the most valuable benefits of belonging to AWA.

### Strengthening our foundations

Much of our focus was on building the systems and capabilities that support the member experience.

We upgraded the Member Hub – our online portal where members can easily manage their membership details and access exclusive resources – and progressed the Event Hub to make event registrations, as well as abstract and award submissions, simpler and easier to facilitate. Our major digital innovation, Indigo – a new library for technical and sector knowledge – is nearing launch. Progress has taken time, but we've prioritised quality, knowing these platforms will support member value well into the future.

We continued to invest in people and culture by strengthening connection across the Association and the

water community through reconciliation action, and accessibility and inclusion initiatives. Our new National Mentoring Program created opportunities for members to connect, particularly in regional and remote areas. Our Young Water Professionals also gained a stronger voice in governance. And across everything we do, volunteers gave their time and skills generously – shaping events, programs and publications. Their contribution is embedded in every success shared here.

### Performing with care

Financially, FY25 closed in a strong position. We invested significantly in strategic initiatives to close out Strategy'25, delivered a modest surplus without having to draw from reserves as was planned, and invested in digital capability and organisational development. Membership grew at the individual level, and retention among top corporate members was 100%.

These results reflect a resilient organisation – one that can invest in the future while remaining a careful steward of resources today.

### Ready for what's next

All of this – the delivery, the investment, and the way we managed our finances and culture – has been about preparing AWA for its next chapter.

Strategy'25 renewed our systems, strengthened our foundations and expanded our reach. As we move into Strategy 2030, we do so with confidence, ready to respond to the challenges ahead – from climate and infrastructure pressures to the growing need for community engagement and cross-sector collaboration.

What gives me confidence isn't just the strategy or the systems – it's the people. Our members, volunteers, staff and partners have brought energy, generosity and commitment to every part of our journey. Together, we've closed one chapter with strength and are stepping into the next with momentum.

Thank you for the role you've played in this journey. I invite you to explore the stories and highlights in this Annual Review. They reflect what we've achieved together – and show what's possible when we move forward, as one community, toward a sustainable water future.

Corinne Cheeseman  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian Water Association



# About us & Strategy'25

The Australian Water Association (AWA) is the professional network where water connections are made. Our purpose throughout FY25 has been simple yet powerful: we share knowledge, connect people with purpose, and inspire positive change. With over 6,500 individual and 600 corporate members, AWA brings together the breadth of Australia's water sector – from those just starting out to long-standing leaders.

Our members work across every discipline touched by water: scientists and engineers, urban designers and planners, treatment plant operators, consultants, academics and researchers, educators and communicators, policy makers and regulators, asset managers and data scientists, manufacturers, tradespeople, and more. What unites them is a shared commitment to a sustainable water future and a recognition that the challenges we face can only be addressed together.

AWA membership opens the door to this community. Through local and national events, mentoring, Specialist Networks, publications and programs, members share experiences, build capability, and create impact across the water sector and beyond.

Our members come from:

- Water utilities and authorities
- Local, state and federal government agencies
- Regulators and energy providers
- Universities and research organisations

- Manufacturers and suppliers
- Laboratories and testing companies
- Environmental planning and management
- Mining, resources, agriculture and irrigation
- Technology, IoT and infrastructure partners
- Specialist contractors, consulting and advisory firms

This diversity is our strength. By bringing together every perspective – technical, policy, operational, cultural and community – AWA creates the connections that drive innovation, collaboration and leadership.

At its heart, AWA works to:

- Share knowledge – from research and projects to services, leadership and professional development, delivered through events, content and publications.
  - Connect with stakeholders – opening doors to new roles, networks, mentoring, partnerships and discounts across flagship events such as Ozwater.
  - Inspire positive change – through recognition programs like the Australian Water Awards, initiatives that champion diversity and reconciliation, and international engagement that extends our impact across the region.
- These three aims – share, connect, inspire – guide everything we do.



# Strategy'25: building the foundations

From 2022 to 2025, our work was guided by Strategy'25. Its focus was to strengthen AWA's capability while broadening the value we provide. FY25 marked the final year of this strategy – a year of consolidation, investment and transition.

**Our Purpose**  
Inspire and Drive a Sustainable Water Future

**10 Year Aspiration (2032)**  
Water is recognised by all as essential to economic prosperity, health, the environment and Indigenous connection to Country.

## Strategy'25

**Value Proposition**  
Share  
Connect  
Inspire

**Values**  
Passionate  
Collaborative  
Inclusive

### Strategy'25 Focus Areas

Member  
Experience

Water for  
Development

Indigenous  
and  
Community  
Collaboration

Enabled by

Data and Digital

People and Culture



# FY2024-25

## Member experience

**Ozwater'25:**  
1,726 delegates  
200+ exhibitors  
420 international delegates from 88 countries  
**Net Promoter Score of 54**

**Local events:**  
11,333 registrations  
32% female participation (up from 28%)  
**+26% new member attendees**  
Local events contributed to AWA's overall Net Promoter Score of +20.

## Water for sustainable & resilient communities

**International Development Program:**  
3 strategic partnerships secured (Cambodia, Pacific, Tasmania-Indonesia)  
**Flexible engagement model** established to strengthen collaboration and capacity

**International Trade Program:**  
New Trade Offering launched  
Opportunities to connect through the **Australian Pavillion at Singapore International Water Week**

## Indigenous & community collaboration

**Reconciliation Action Plan:** Completed actions under our **Reflect RAP**, including cultural learning for staff  
**50% Aboriginal representation** on RAP Advisory Group

**Voices from the Bush:**  
Co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders  
218 delegates  
**22% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendance**

**National Water Week:**  
5,000+ poster entries  
25 Water Ambassadors and 23 schools registered  
25 listed events (up from 16)

**Careers in Water:**  
42% increase in website traffic  
Jobs posted doubled  
4 new founding partners including 2 universities  
3-year strategic plan launched

## People & culture

**National Mentoring Program:**  
280 mentoring pairs (target 200)  
16% regional participation (target 2%)  
96% rated good/excellent  
13 new members attracted

**Inclusion:** Closed captions, sensory adjustments & quiet rooms embedded in events  
Pride in Water & WaterAble featured nationally

**Employee experience:**  
New HR and payroll platform launched to strengthen support across every stage of the employee journey  
Enhanced onboarding, development and performance management

## Data & digital

**Member Hub:**  
51% increase in Specialist Network members  
New and streamlined corporate member tools  
**Self-service membership** management introduced, empowering members to connect, update and engage

**Digital capability uplift:** Strengthened cybersecurity and data maturity, reducing risk and building organisational resilience

## Business performance

**Financial results:**  
\$52k surplus vs planned deficit budget  
Reserves stable at \$8.2m  
Revenue \$11.3m

**Membership:**  
+7% growth in individual members  
88 new corporate members (highest ever)  
100% retention at top tiers  
24 corporate upgrades (record high)

**Investment:**  
\$1.3m invested across projects and platforms in FY25

**Capability:**  
+9 increase in organisational capability maturity score (target +1), including areas such as Governance, Risk & Legal, IT & Data, Volunteer and Member Lifecycle Management, and Corporate Strategy





# *Member* EXPERIENCE

FY25 was a pivotal year for the Australian Water Association (AWA) and our members. As we closed out Strategy'25 and developed Strategy 2030, our focus remained steadfast on delivering meaningful experiences for members, while laying strong foundations for long-term impact.

Member experience sits at the heart of our ambition to deliver meaningful value for water professionals today and into the future. Through national and local events, recognition programs and our growing content platforms, we created opportunities for water professionals across Australia to connect, grow and celebrate together. What set this year apart was not only the breadth of activity, but also the deliberate steps we took to evolve how members engage with AWA, with new formats, stronger inclusion and sharper alignment with sector challenges.

Here is how we created opportunities for our members to come together in FY25: to share knowledge, strengthen networks, and prepare as a community for the opportunities and challenges of the years ahead.



# Ozwater'25

Ozwater'25 again confirmed its place as Australia's premier water conference and exhibition and, this year, it marked a transition in how AWA connects people, ideas, and influence.

Our goals were ambitious yet clear: maintain leadership in convening Australia's largest water conference, deliver a program of breadth and quality, and ensure value for members. With 1,726 delegates, 200+ exhibitors, and strong international representation, our attendance targets were exceeded. We are proud to say that Ozwater continues to grow, year on year. Importantly, the program reflected a diversity of perspectives, reinforcing Ozwater as a platform where every part of the sector has a voice.

Some distinctive step changes shaped this year's event. Keynote speakers came directly from the water sector, aligning plenary sessions with the sector's lived realities. A narrative arc – past, present, future – threaded across the three days, giving coherence to keynotes, panels and technical papers. The plenary format itself evolved, with morning sessions closing in panel conversations that encouraged dialogue and connection.

Alongside its vast program of technical presentations and discussions, Ozwater'25 placed equal emphasis on human stories. Keynotes grounded complex challenges in lived experience, while panels on reconciliation, diversity and workforce wellbeing reinforced that water is, above all, about people. The screening of Washed Away, a documentary on the NSW Northern Rivers flood recovery, was one example, complemented by sessions on inclusion and resilience that highlighted the sector's wider social and cultural impact.

Feedback highlighted the event's strong value, with a Net Promoter Score of 54 – an excellent result reflecting high member satisfaction. Members praised the exceptional networking opportunities, diverse content, and lasting benefits of the connections forged. Furthermore, increased engagement with non-delegates on social media suggests recognition of the value of Ozwater is growing more broadly, too. Ozwater'25 was more than a successful event, it was a platform that demonstrated how we can evolve national conversations while preparing the sector for the future.

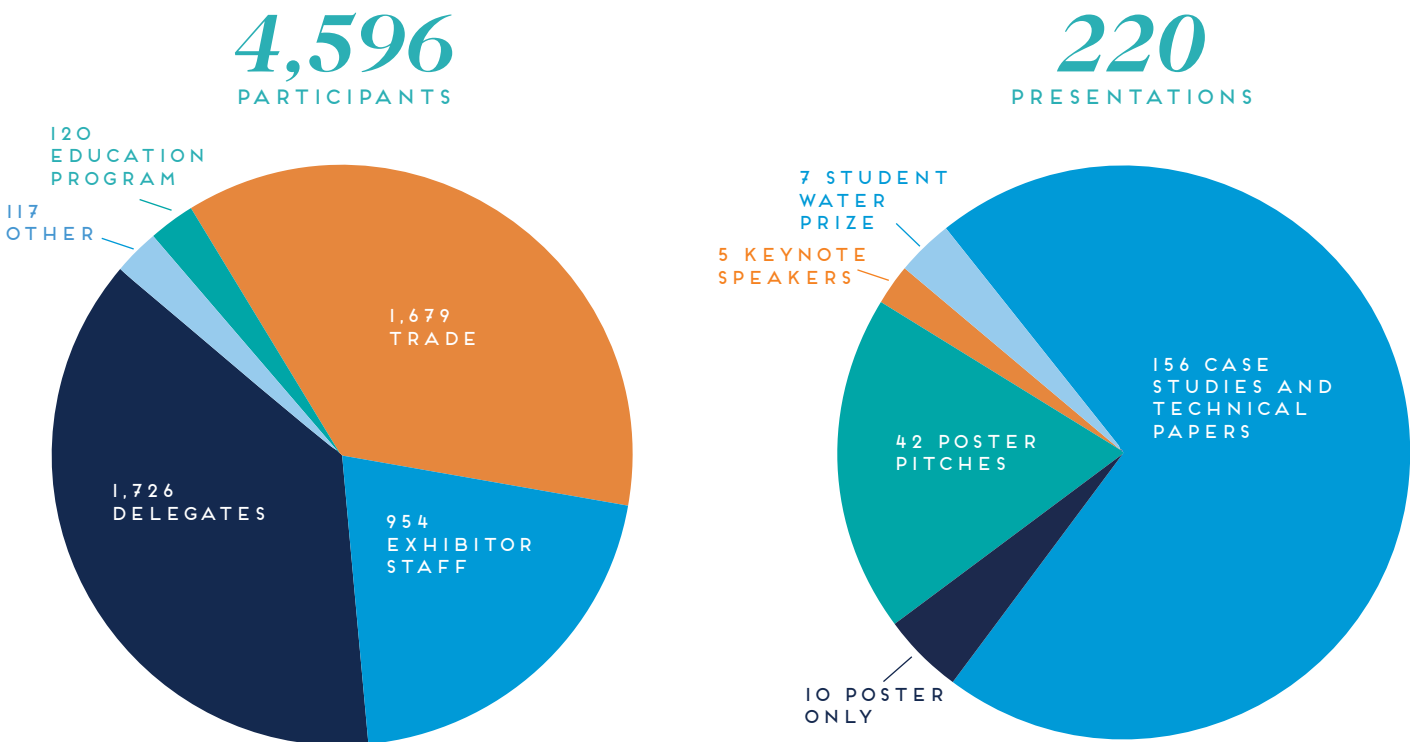
## Water Leaders & Directors Forums

Held during Ozwater'25, the Water Leaders and Directors Forums are held exclusively for AWA's Principal, Platinum and Gold Members, creating space for executives and directors to reflect on leadership and governance.

The Water Leaders Forum explored workforce sustainability, innovation and nature-based infrastructure through a past-present-future dialogue, with perspectives from Robyn McLeod, Stuart Cairns and futurist Ariella Helfgott. The Directors Forum broadened participation to board directors, focusing on investment and governance.

Both forums used interactive formats that generated thought-provoking discussion, reinforcing AWA's role as convener of cross-sector dialogue.

# Net Promotor Score: 54



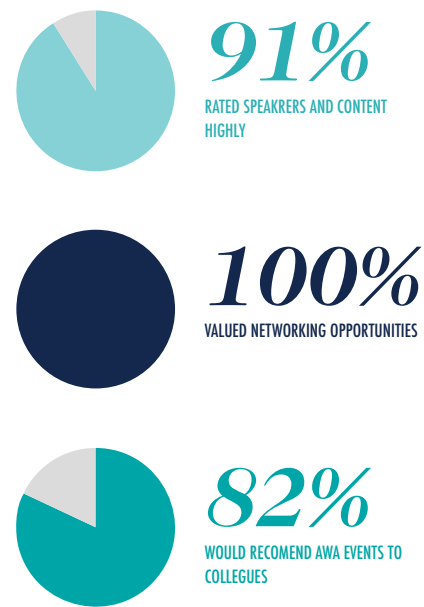
**“Ozwater is an excellent forum to gain insights and lessons from across the water sector. It is a highly collegiate industry and contacts made at Ozwater provide valuable sharing and learning experiences for many years.”**

Peter Spencer, Water Corporation

**“The networking opportunities were exceptional, fostering connections with like-minded professionals passionate about shaping the future of our industry.”**

Vanessa Trzcinka, Beca HunterH2O





## National Biosolids Conference

The biennial National Biosolids Conference, held in February 2025 in Hobart, explored the theme Biosolids: Future Possibilities. Over two days, regulators, researchers, utilities and community representatives came together to share knowledge and explore innovation in biosolids management.

The program highlighted opportunities for circular economy solutions, sustainability, and innovation, while also addressing the challenges facing the sector. Participants praised the diversity of stakeholders represented and the balance of technical and practical content. Suggestions for future events included more international perspectives and greater focus on regional biosolids challenges.

The conference reaffirmed AWA's role in convening expertise around specialist issues, ensuring that even highly technical areas benefit from national dialogue and shared learning.



## Celebrating excellence

The Australian Water Awards remain one of AWA's most respected programs, recognising excellence and celebrating innovation across the sector.

In 2025, nominations increased notably from the previous year, reflecting broader visibility and diversity among applicants. More women and early-career professionals were recognised, highlighting the Awards' growing inclusivity and reach.

The Awards provide significant value for members. Winners gain visibility within their organisations and across the sector, while finalists are celebrated as leaders in innovation and best practice. Aligning the Awards with Ozwater maximises visibility and positions them as a national celebration of achievement.



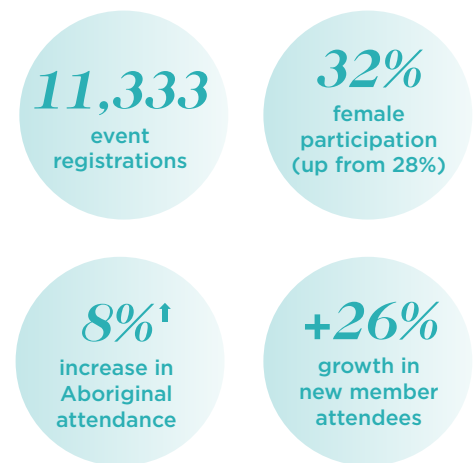
## Nuturing community

Local events remained the backbone of member engagement in FY25, offering local opportunities for networking, professional development and community building.

Across the year, 11,333 registrations were recorded, slightly down from 13,715 in FY24. Despite this, indicators of inclusivity and impact improved. Female and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation increased, as did new member attendance. Satisfaction remained strong, with an average rating of 4.4 out of 5, and local events contributed to AWA's overall Net Promoter Score of +20.

These outcomes highlight the importance of local events in building relationships and accessibility. Members benefit from engaging with peers locally, while regional hubs in NSW and Queensland extended opportunities to communities outside city centres. While national events provide visibility, local activities ensure that every member, regardless of location, has meaningful opportunities to connect.

Furthermore, our Specialist Networks grew significantly. Following concerted effort in elevating the Specialist Networks to make them more visible, we have increased the number of members involved across Specialist Networks by 51% (2,400+ new members).







NATIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

280

mentoring pairs  
(target 200)

16%

regional participation  
(target 2%)

96%

rated good or  
excellent mid-year

13

new members

Supporting members

As AWA continued to strengthen connection across the sector, a key focus in FY25 was ensuring that every member – regardless of background or location – could access opportunities for growth and leadership.

The launch of the National Mentoring Program was a defining milestone, creating a structured, equitable pathway for professional development. Supported by a new digital platform, the program removed barriers to participation through automated matching, goal-setting tools and national access. Importantly, it was designed to reach members in regional, rural and remote communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and those from migrant backgrounds, expanding inclusion and representation across the mentoring network.

Looking ahead, the program will continue to evolve with a focus on digital goal-tracking and expanding targeted support for underrepresented and minority groups, ensuring equity in both access and outcomes.

Young Water Professionals (YWP) were another major focus during the year. Alongside YWP Day at Ozwater, the VIC Branch introduced a professional development master series covering project management, Excel skills and candid leadership conversations. Nationally, the YWP Taskforce strengthened its influence in governance, presenting annually to the Member Experience Subcommittee and securing a seat at one Board meeting each year. This step formalised the YWP voice in decision-making, positioning emerging professionals as active contributors to sector strategy.

Together, these initiatives reflect AWA's commitment to empowering people and building a diverse leadership pipeline. By combining mentoring, skills development and youth representation, AWA is helping ensure the water sector's future is inclusive, capable and community-driven.

Connecting through content

AWA's digital content suite continued to strengthen member engagement, providing multiple entry points for knowledge and connection.

Source newsletter maintained its position as the sector's trusted update, with open rates above 22% and click-through rates surpassing non-profit benchmarks. Members view Source as a reliable filter for water community news, resources and events. Current magazine grew in reach and depth. The April 2025 digital edition recorded a significant increase in readers. Downloads nearly tripled, showing members value retaining and sharing content.

Podcast engagement remained steady at around 2,400 downloads, with popular episodes extending event conversations into accessible, on-demand formats. The Water e-Journal published 10 peer-reviewed papers and launched the Student Showcase session at Ozwater'25, attracting 13 student submissions. Four of those students became members, showing the Journal's role in nurturing new talent.

Together, these platforms meet different member needs – immediacy (Source), depth (Current), accessibility (Podcast), and academic credibility (WeJ). Looking ahead, we intend to deepen our understanding of member content preferences, refining delivery to ensure relevance and stronger engagement across all channels.

Source	Current	Podcast	Water e-Journal
22% open rate	1,189 reads (+20% increase)	2,400 downloads	13 student submissions
20.8% c\ click-through rate	95 downloads		4 new members





# *Water for Sustainable* **& RESILIENT COMMUNITIES**

By 2025, AWA set the goal of being recognised for thought leadership and programs in Australia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific that promote and deliver sustainable water outcomes for all. This year, progress on that goal reflected both the challenges of transition and the strength of AWA's convening role.

FY25 saw the International Development Program evolve in response to shifting political, economic and environmental conditions, with new partnerships secured, funding diversified, and a more flexible model of engagement and delivery adopted. The International Trade Program also shifted direction, moving away from large delegations and piloting smaller, more flexible models.

Technical leadership was evident through the Australian and New Zealand Biosolids Partnership and the newly launched Circular Water Taskforce, both providing platforms to shape policy and practice in areas of national importance.

Submissions at both national and state levels reinforced AWA's call for stronger climate resilience, transparent governance and long-term investment in water security. Nationally, AWA contributed to key policy processes including the draft principles for a new National Water Agreement, the Productivity Commission inquiry and the Circular Economy agenda – ensuring the sector's voice was represented in shaping Australia's future water framework.

Together, these activities showed how AWA is preparing for the future while navigating change. Members continued to influence regional and global water conversations, contribute to policy, and shape sustainable practice – ensuring the Association remains a trusted voice on resilience and sustainability.



# International Development Program

FY25 saw the program evolve in response to shifting political, economic and environmental conditions. By adopting a more agile and inclusive approach, the following key outcomes were achieved: new partnerships secured, funding diversified, and a more flexible model of engagement and delivery adopted to draw on a wider pool of member expertise and experience – from utilities and service providers to education specialists, communications professionals and customer service teams. Three partnership programs secured or continued in FY25 illustrate this shift:



## CAMBODIA-AUSTRALIA WATER PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

A capacity-building initiative focused on knowledge exchange, supporting Cambodian utilities and private operators to strengthen governance, expand services and progress towards the national target of universal water access by 2030.

## PACIFIC WATER KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Delivered in partnership with the Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, this program involves Solomon Water, Tonga Water Board and Vanuatu’s Department of Water Resources. It builds on earlier collaborations to deepen regional connections, share expertise, and strengthen resilience in the face of climate and infrastructure challenges.

## TASMANIA-LOMBOK WATER RESILIENCE PROGRAM

A continuation of a successful Australian Water Partnership initiative, this program links TasWater with Lombok’s utility in Indonesia. Now supported by the Australia-Indonesia Institute, the partnership focuses on practical knowledge exchange and resilience-building, ensuring lessons learned from past collaboration continue to deliver long-term benefits for both partners.

These 12-18 month initiatives (due to complete at Ozwater’26) mark a new chapter in how AWA engages internationally. This new approach positions AWA to remain responsive to shifting conditions while reinforcing trusted relationships with key stakeholders across the region. Crucially, it also demonstrates Australia’s value as a capacity-building partner in locally led, needs driven development for long-term, sustainable impact.

## Partner perspective

Anna Whelan, Senior Process Engineer at Townsville City Council, joined the Australian delegation to the Cambodian Water Conference and Exhibition as part of AWA’s Cambodia-Australia Water Partnership Project

“I could see a genuine desire and optimism within the Cambodian water sector to improve services, unite the many contributing parties and work towards their 2030 target of 100% water supply to all communities. Technology is not the hard part of the challenge – it is education, collaboration and sustainable financing – and continued partnerships with organisations like AWA will be key.”

420  
international delegates from  
88  
countries at Ozwater’25

21  
sponsored leaders from  
South East Asia and the  
Pacific

3  
new partnerships secured  
(Cambodia, Pacific,  
Tasmania-Indonesia)

New Trade Prospectus  
launched

Singapore pilot delivered  
(June 2025)  
Malaysia study tour planned  
(2026)

# International Trade Program

The International Trade Program also adapted to changing circumstances. With declining subsidies and lower member appetite limiting demand for large delegations, AWA redirected efforts towards formats that are more practical, cost-effective and demand-led.

A series of exhibition visits were facilitated to connect international delegates from Vietnam with exhibitors at Ozwater’25. Targeted meetings were also arranged between Australian water technology and service providers, consultants, and delegates from the Pacific, Singapore, Indonesia, and Cambodia. AWA team, with support from Trade and Investment Department of State Development, South Australia Government, held a half-day Technology showcase at Ozwater’25 with presentations of representatives from Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and South Australia companies.

AWA’s new Trade Program, launched in FY25, provides flexible options such as sites tours, networking events, curated business meetings and/or an exhibition booth at Australian Pavilions. Two markets emerged as members’ priorities: Singapore and Malaysia. These markets highlight how targeted, high-value engagement can deliver opportunities without the overhead of larger delegations. AWA also worked closely with the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) and other state trade and investment agencies to leverage their supports to members who are interested in exploring these two markets.

Feedback confirmed that flexibility is the right path, but challenges remain. The high cost of doing business in Asia-Pacific and the scale of domestic infrastructure investment mean many members are currently focused closer to home. AWA’s role is to identify the most promising international opportunities, build strong pathways for inbound delegations, and continue to showcase Australian capability to global audiences.



# Welcoming our international partners

Ozwater'25 showcased AWA's international reach on home soil. The event welcomed 420 delegates from 88 countries, including 21 sponsored leaders from Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Over three days, tailored sessions facilitated bilateral networking, trade introductions and panels on climate resilience, water reform and inclusive services. More than 600 people attended these international sessions, amplifying Australia's leadership and extending AWA's presence across the region.

## Australian & New Zealand Biosolids Partnership & Circular Water Taskforce

The Australian and New Zealand Biosolids Partnership (ANZBP) continued to provide trusted leadership on biosolids issues, delivering policy submissions, hosting knowledge-sharing events, and beginning work on a new end-use study on PFAS, microplastics and land application regulation. ANZBP's credibility with governments and regulators remains one of its greatest assets.

AWA launched the Circular Water Taskforce in partnership with Circular Australia in May 2025. The Taskforce offers a collaborative platform for members to embed circular economy principles into water management, focusing on biosolids, recycled water and biogas reuse. It has already begun shaping national discussions on how Australia will balance resource recovery, regulation and sustainability in the coming decade.

Together, ANZBP and the Circular Water Taskforce demonstrate how AWA combines technical expertise with policy influence, ensuring water remains at the heart of Australia's circular economy transition.







# INDIGENOUS & COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

By 2025, AWA set the goal of creating culturally safe spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water knowledge, strengthening reconciliation in practice, and building water literacy across communities and schools. This year, our progress reflected a growing maturity, moving from awareness and acknowledgement to tangible partnerships, cultural protocols and community-led initiatives.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan advanced from internal reflection to sector-wide influence, with concrete milestones in partnerships, procurement and cultural capability. The Voices from the Bush conference provided a national stage for Aboriginal leadership, embedding cultural governance and creating space for challenging, but vital conversations.

National Water Week and the Ozwater Education Hub extended engagement to schools and communities, inspiring students and promoting water literacy. Meanwhile, the Careers in Water program grew in scale and ambition, building a pipeline of future professionals and connecting new audiences with the sector.

Together, these activities demonstrate how AWA is preparing for the future by embedding reconciliation, amplifying diverse voices and inspiring the next generation.



# Reconciliation Action Plan

AWA's reconciliation journey matured significantly in FY25, progressing from the Reflect RAP into the Innovate stage of Reconciliation Australia's framework. The Reflect RAP aimed to build internal awareness and lay the foundation for meaningful action – helping AWA strengthen cultural capability, relationships and respect across the organisation and broader water community. Key actions included establishing and co-facilitating the shared AWA-WSAA RAP Advisory Group, delivering staff cultural learning programs with Dr Phil Duncan, and amplifying member engagement through National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week events, including AWA's well-received Reconciliation Week webinar. The Reflect RAP also advanced practical change through the development of an anti-discrimination policy, research into First Nations employment pathways, and increased procurement from Aboriginal-owned businesses.

Internally, AWA has strengthened cultural capability through continued training and governance measures, while the AWA-WSAA RAP Advisory Group – with over 50% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation – ensures accountability and embeds cultural perspectives into decision-making.

The impacts are evident. Staff report greater confidence with cultural protocols, members value cultural visibility at events, and utilities and governments are beginning to adapt practices informed by Aboriginal perspectives. FY25 showed that reconciliation is no longer just about awareness for AWA – it's shaping practice, culture and conversations across the sector, reinforcing reconciliation as integral to a sustainable water future.

## Centering Aboriginal voices

Held on Arrernte Country in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), Voices from the Bush 2024 marked a significant evolution from the inaugural 2022 gathering – maturing from a pilot into a nationally recognised platform for truth-telling, co-design and authentic engagement.

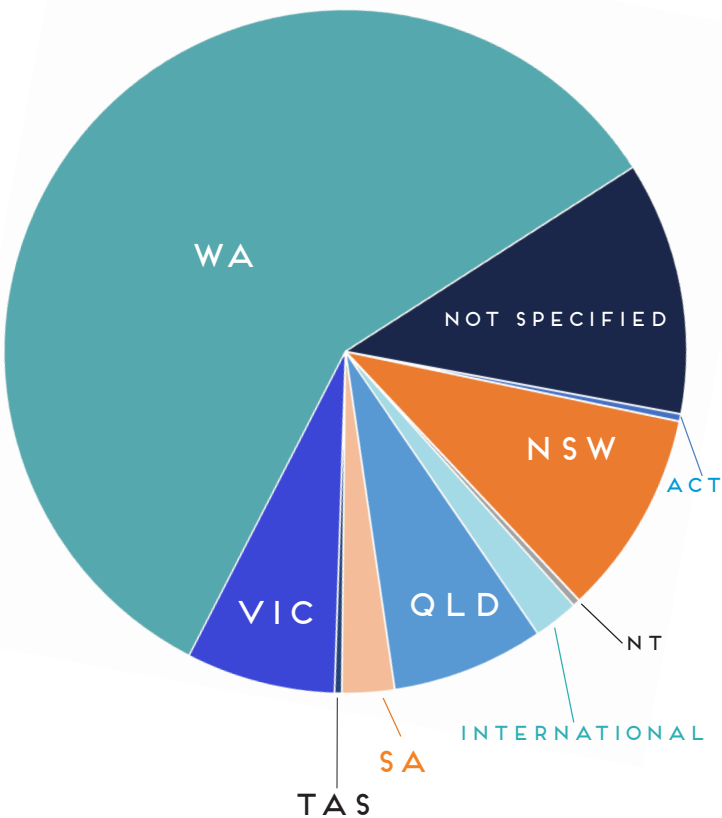
Chaired by proud Aboriginal woman Kiara Johnson and guided by an Aboriginal-led advisory group, the event placed cultural safety and Aboriginal leadership at its core. Sessions were co-developed with Traditional Owners and communities, ensuring Aboriginal voices set the agenda rather than being added as an afterthought. Collaboration with WSAA added technical depth and broadened industry participation, creating a program that was both rigorous and culturally grounded.

The conversations were raw and, at times, uncomfortable. Delegates confronted difficult truths: that some communities still lack reliable access to safe water; that fly-in, fly-out service delivery undermines local capability; and that investment too often bypasses Aboriginal organisations. These realities challenged the sector to rethink how it engages and partners with communities. Importantly, sponsorships helped remove financial barriers, enabling greater Aboriginal

participation and strengthening community representation. The impact was tangible: survey results showed participants left with new commitments to engage earlier with communities, embed co-design and take responsibility for change within their own organisations. Utilities and governments reported stronger relationships, while Aboriginal leaders described feeling respected and heard. As one participant reflected, the event sparked a shift in worldview as much as in practice.

Voices from the Bush 2024 demonstrated that reconciliation is not a side initiative, but a central pillar of a sustainable water future. More than an event, it has become a platform for systemic change – fostering humility, inclusion and courage across the sector, and showing that creating safe yet challenging spaces is essential for progress.

### National representation at Voices 2024



**218** attendees

**24** YWPs

**43** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendees

**22** new memberships

**106** organisations represented



# Inclusion at events

The themes of cultural governance and truth-telling extended beyond Voices and into Ozwater'25, reflecting a consistent commitment across all AWA events to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols and participation. For many years, Welcome to Country is has been delivered at AWA events, while smoking ceremonies and performances by local Aboriginal artists have become integral to opening AWA's major gatherings, grounding delegates in cultural respect.

At Ozwater'25, a keynote by proud Kurna and Narungga man Jack Buckskin provided inspiration and historical context, while dedicated sessions highlighted Aboriginal leadership in water management. Workshops such as Beyond Reconciliation Action Plans explored training, employment, procurement and cultural rites, while the highest-attended panel – Keep the Fire Burning – focused on truth-telling, co-design, and reconciliation pathways.

These inclusions ensured that Aboriginal perspectives were not limited to specialist forums but positioned at the heart of AWA's most visible stage, reinforcing reconciliation as a shared responsibility for the whole sector.

# Bolstering water literacy

National Water Week 2024 centred on the theme Accelerating Action, highlighting water's role in the climate crisis. While AWA coordinated national activities, the week was driven by sector-wide participation, with utilities, councils and community groups hosting celebrations across the country.

Highlights included the national poster competition, which drew more than 5,000 entries from five states and territories, and the Water Ambassadors program, which had registrations from 25 professionals and 23 schools. In total, 25 events were listed nationally – up from 16 the year before.

Our YWP community held a webinar on water's role in addressing the climate crisis, featuring insights on what they are doing to accelerate action towards a sustainable water future. Engagement extended through the National Water Week website, newsletters and social media, while launch events foregrounded Traditional Owner perspectives alongside climate action.

Looking ahead, AWA intends to develop National Water Week further, including strengthen media partnerships, introduce clear calls to action and pilot new initiatives, building on the week's role in raising the importance of sustainable water management within the broader community.

The Education Hub at Ozwater'25 offered hands-on opportunities for students to explore water issues and careers. New features included a Xylem-led filtration experiment for primary groups and a Water Literacy talk by Sydney Water Ambassador Shane Jacobson for secondary students, alongside the longstanding Fulton Hogan education program activities.

Feedback from educators and facilitators was positive, with students expressing interest in water careers, though turnout for tertiary sessions remained low.

# Careers in Water

The Careers in Water program advanced significantly this year, consolidating its role as an important water sector workforce initiative. Designed to build pathways into water careers – particularly for students, young professionals and regional communities – the program continued to grow in reach and influence.

A major milestone was the completion of a three-year strategic plan, developed in collaboration with founding partners. This plan provides clear direction and accountability, ensuring the program is guided by industry needs and has the structure to scale. The founding partner group also expanded, with four new organisations – including two universities – joining to strengthen governance and funding.

Program delivery was equally active. New water stories showcased diverse career pathways, from cross-sector journeys to incredible international experiences.

The Careers in Water jobs board continued to build momentum, with traffic to the website increasing by 42% and the number of job postings doubling year-on-year. Despite only 15% of corporate members posting vacancies, this growth demonstrates clear demand for a centralised hub. Importantly, AWA secured a seat on BuildSkills Australia's Water Advisory Body, giving the program national influence in shaping workforce development policy for operators.

Looking ahead, the focus will be on deepening employer participation in the jobs board, rolling out career pathway profiles and student engagement toolkits, and continuing to capture and share career stories. These initiatives will strengthen visibility, demonstrate the breadth of opportunities in the sector, and ensure Careers in Water remains the go-to platform for attracting and nurturing future talent

## CAREERS IN WATER GROWTH

4  
new founding  
partners, including 2  
universities

3 year  
strategic plan  
completed

42%  
increase in website  
traffic

jobs posted doubled  
year-on-year

## NATIONAL WATER WEEK 2024

5,000  
poster entries

25  
Ambassadors  
23  
schools

25  
listed events  
(up from 16 in 2023)



# PEOPLE & CULTURE

**People are at the heart of AWA's impact. By 2025, our ambition was to foster a culture that is inclusive, connected and collaborative – one that supports everyone working toward a sustainable water future.**

**In FY25, that ambition came to life. Inclusivity was embedded more deeply through reconciliation initiatives, accessibility improvements, and partnerships with Pride in Water, WaterAble and the Water Sector Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Coalition. Professional growth was supported through expanded opportunities for Young Water Professionals. At the same time, AWA honoured the achievements of long-standing leaders through peer awards and fellowships.**

**Together, these activities reflect a maturing culture – one that values its people, elevates diverse voices, and prepares the sector for a future that is both inclusive and sustainable.**

## Building an inclusive culture

AWA's Reconciliation Action Plan continued to provide structure for embedding reconciliation into the organisation. While much of the detailed work is reflected elsewhere in this review, its impact on culture was felt strongly this year. Regular engagement with our RAP advisory group deepened staff awareness and supported more confident, respectful interactions across events and programs. This cultural maturity underpins the way AWA shows up in the sector.

Inclusivity extended across our diversity partnerships and event practices. Pride in Water was given a prominent position in the Exhibition Hall at Ozwater'25, a powerful signal of AWA's ongoing commitment to equity for LGBTQIA+ members. Pride in Water also featured more regularly at state branch events, broadening its reach and reinforcing that inclusion is embedded at both national and local levels. We also support WaterAble by amplifying the diverse voices of people living with disabilities on our communications channels.

Accessibility was another priority. Across flagship and local events, we introduced practical measures such as closed captions, fragrance-free policies, sensory adjustments and quiet rooms. These changes, though sometimes small, made a tangible difference in enabling neurodiverse colleagues and participants with accessibility needs to fully take part.

AWA also deepened its role as a sector convener on inclusion through the Water Sector Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Coalition. Co-chaired by AWA's CEO and WSAA's Executive Director, and including NSW Water Directorate, VicWater, qldWater and WIOA, the Coalition brings together peak bodies to identify challenges, develop initiatives and share practices. Meeting quarterly, the Coalition has established itself as a trusted forum for collective action on issues ranging from gender representation to accessibility. For AWA, co-chairing the Coalition reflects our commitment to collaboration and ensures that our inclusivity work is not confined within the Association but shared across the wider water community.

By embedding reconciliation, celebrating diversity, expanding accessibility and driving sector collaboration, FY25 marked a shift from aspiration to practice in AWA's inclusivity journey.

## Employee experience

This year, we introduced Employment Hero – a HR, payroll and recruitment platform – to strengthen how we support AWA employees across every stage of their journey with

AWA. From onboarding and development to performance and progression, this new platform helps us create a more connected, transparent, and empowering employee experience. It provides our team with the tools and resources they need to learn, grow, and thrive – ensuring we continue to attract and retain passionate, skilled people who share our commitment to excellence and impact.

Our people – staff and volunteers alike – are at the heart of what we do. They bring our purpose to life every day through their expertise, energy, and care. As a member-centric organisation, we know that great member outcomes start with engaged, supported, and fulfilled people.

By investing in tools like Employment Hero and nurturing a culture of growth and wellbeing, we're ensuring our people feel valued and equipped to do their best work for our members and communities.

## Celebrating service and leadership

Recognition remained a cornerstone of AWA's culture in FY25, with honours and fellowships spotlighting members whose contributions extend well beyond their roles. Unlike the Australian Water Awards, which celebrate specific projects or initiatives, these peer-to-peer honours represent enduring service, legacy and leadership.

AWA Exceptional Service recognition was awarded to Neil Palmer and Francois Gouws, while Lifetime Achievement honours were bestowed on Nerida Beard and Mal Shepherd. These acknowledgements carry deep meaning, celebrating the impact and contributions these individuals have made to the water community.

Distinct from AWA's honours, the Chris Davis AM Fellowship supports individuals leading projects, initiatives or research that contribute to sustainable water management in Australia, reflecting the values championed by Chris Davis AM. In 2025, the Fellowship was awarded to Jessica Bohorquez. Jessica's project expanded Our Water Connection, a podcast aimed at strengthening community understanding and valuing of water. By nurturing emerging leaders with vision and passion, the Fellowship helps build the next generation of changemakers in the sector.

Through both honours and fellowships, AWA reinforces a culture of respect and impact. While the honours recognise enduring service and leadership, the Fellowship empowers aspiring leaders to help drive a sustainable water future.



**2025 HONOUR ROLE**  
**Exceptional Service**  
**Neil Palmer, Francois Gouws**

**Lifetime Achievement**  
**Nerida Beard, Mal Shepherd**



# DATA & DIGITAL

By 2025, AWA set the ambition of delivering a personalised member experience, a valued online library, and data-driven decision-making – all underpinned by secure, modern systems. FY25 was about building those foundations.

The Member Hub was completely refreshed, giving members practical self-service tools, making it easier for them to locate and update their details. Development of the Event Hub continued to progress, laying the groundwork to bring registrations, submissions and awards into a single streamlined system. At the same time, AWA lifted its data maturity, with stronger governance, improved member insights and cybersecurity training that has reduced risk and strengthened resilience.

The Digital Library has not yet launched, but development is well advanced. Careful work on intellectual property and content rights is ensuring Indigo will deliver as a robust, reliable platform when it goes live in FY26, giving members a trusted home for technical papers, event content and sector insights.

These developments may not always be visible, but they underpin everything AWA delivers. They ensure members can engage more easily, staff can work more efficiently, and the organisation is positioned to deliver Strategy 2030 with secure, modern and reliable digital infrastructure.

## Member Hub

FY25 marked a major step forward in digital infrastructure, with upgrades to the Member Hub laying the groundwork for a more seamless service experience.

The refreshed Member Hub now offers a clean design and practical self-service: members can manage renewals, upgrades and contact details, view event registrations, and access opportunities such as awards, volunteering and job listings. Our Corporate Members can easily add or remove nominated members, ensuring their employees get access to the AWA community.

The impact is already clear, with Specialist Network members rising 51% following the upgrade. This improvement represents more than technology upgrades. They are foundational to AWA's future service delivery, ensuring members enjoy intuitive, accessible digital pathways while staff are freed to focus on higher-value engagement.

### MEMBER HUB HIGHLIGHTS

Self-service membership management

Corporate members can add employees to enhance their Employee Value Proposition

51% increase in Specialist Network members

## Data and cybersecurity

Behind these platforms, AWA also strengthened its digital foundation. FY25 saw the accuracy of reporting, and ensuring better integration with sharpened insights for planning and engagement.

Cybersecurity capability also matured. AWA introduced a Cyber Incident Response Plan, delivered annual and ad-hoc security awareness training, rolled out routine phishing simulations, and implemented a modern and unified endpoint management system. Single sign-on was extended to both member systems and staff platforms, improving security while reducing friction.

A full ISO 27001 gap assessment confirmed no material risks but highlighted human error as the highest vulnerability.

Training and simulations therefore remain a central focus, ensuring staff and members alike are equipped to reduce this risk.

These measures mean AWA is better prepared to protect member data, respond to incidents, and maintain confidence in its systems. Investment in both platforms and people will continue as part of a long-term governance and resilience strategy.

## CYBERSECURITY UPGRADES

Cyber Incident Response Plan & Drills in place

ISO 27001 audit: no material risks identified

Routine security awareness training and phishing simulations for staff

Single sign-on for members and staff platforms

Improved malware detection and response technology

Endpoint encryption on all devices

Strict User Privileges on all devices





# OUR VOLUNTEERS

AWA's achievements are only possible because of the extraordinary commitment of our volunteer community. Volunteers form the foundation of everything we deliver, from the Board and Strategic Advisory Council to Specialist Networks, branch committees, national event program and paper review committees, local and national awards judges, and the Water e-Journal Technical Committee.

Our volunteers shape our programs, bring diversity of expertise, and extend AWA's reach into every corner of the sector. Their contribution is both practical and cultural: practical in helping deliver events and initiatives, cultural in modelling collaboration, generosity and shared purpose.



# A powerhouse of support

This year, volunteer engagement was more visible than ever. Branch and Specialist Network committees curated sold-out technical sessions, study tours and conferences, ensuring programming stayed relevant and connected to member priorities.

In South Australia, a coordinated volunteer marketing approach helped drive record attendance at Sundowners and attract new sponsorship. In Tasmania, volunteers used National Water Week to strengthen ties with local members. The Victorian Branch activated the National Mentoring Program locally and ran a regional study tour that deepened YWP connections and networks.

Specialist Networks made similar contributions. The Water Literacy & Education Network secured Shane Jacobson for a workshop at Ozwater'25, developed a new 'chatterbox' activity, and supported the launch of *Wanda the Water Warrior*, a childrens book by Water Literacy & Education Specialist Network co-Chair Zoe Walsh. The Industrial Water and Trade Waste and Water Recycling Specialist Networks engaged nearly 500 participants across Member Circles, growing members by 80% and 38% respectively. In FY25, there has been a 51% increase in participation across Specialist Networks, showcasing a significant growth in members' interest in contributing to discussion and leadership around areas of work that matter to them most.

Volunteers also contributed to innovation. In SA, a hybrid desalination event with the Desalination Specialist

Network blended local and national perspectives, while a Careers in Water subcommittee brought industry, universities and government into the same room to co-design future pathways.

Nationally, the YWP Taskforce inspired 120 participants during National Water Week with its webinar on water and climate action, demonstrating how the next generation is shaping sector priorities.

Editorial and digital initiatives likewise benefited. The Water e-Journal Technical Committee continued to guide quality publications, while Current and AWA's podcast were enriched by volunteer contributors. Volunteers also helped shape new digital platforms, including early testing of the Digital Library, and one-to-one consultations for the Event Hub project.

## Impact across the sector

The scale of this contribution is difficult to measure, but its impact is everywhere: in every event program, every awards season, every mentoring relationship and every specialist conversation. Volunteers extend AWA's capacity, enrich its culture and create a sense of shared ownership across the membership. Their fingerprints are on all we deliver.

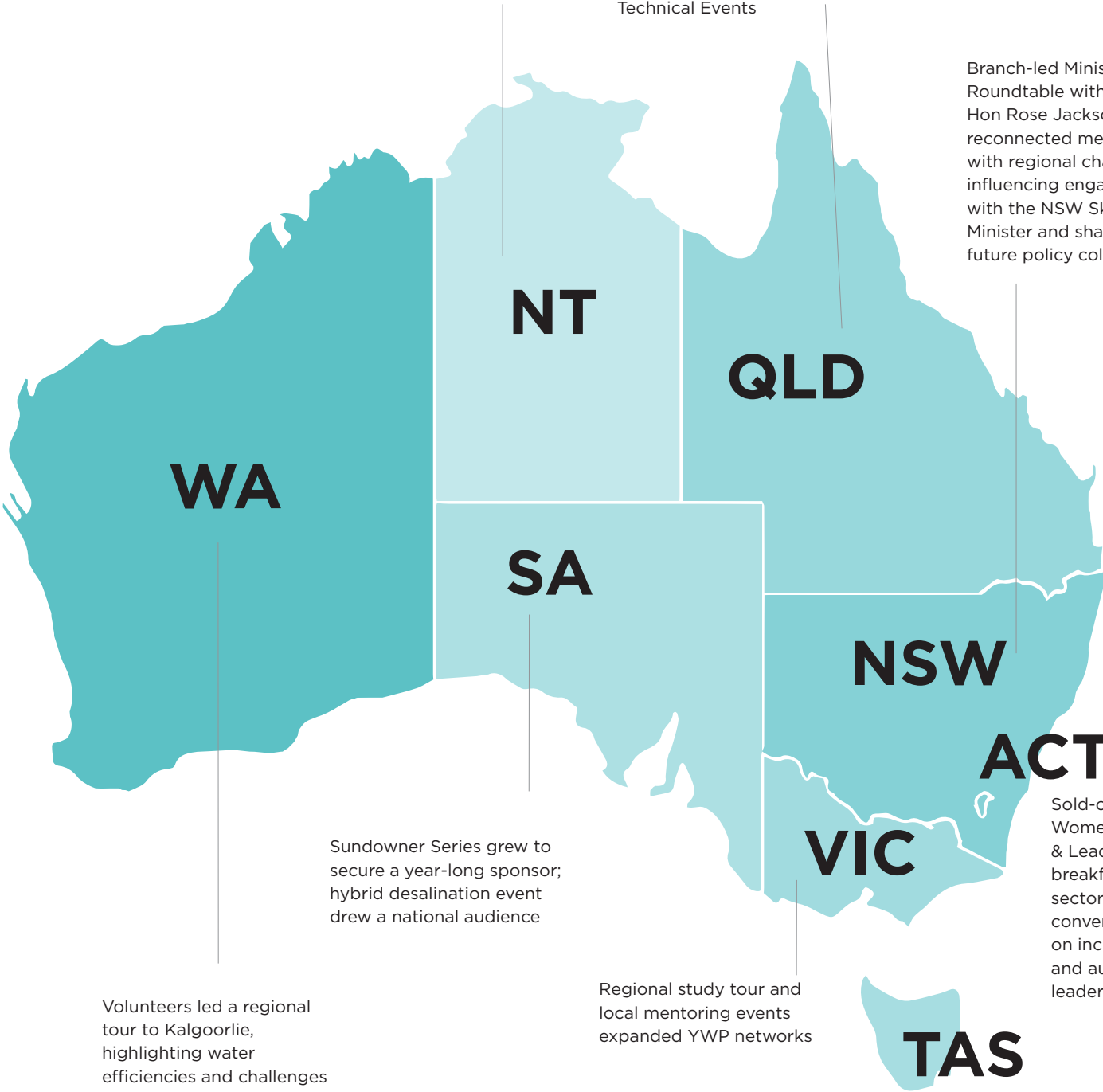
As AWA prepares for Strategy 2030, strengthening volunteer engagement and recognition will be a priority. What remains constant is the truth that without volunteers, AWA would not be able to achieve everything we do. They are not an adjunct to our work – they are at its core.

# Impact across Australia

Volunteers hosted the NT Minister's Breakfast themed, "Shaping the Future: A Water Policy Update". Shaping the Future featured Hon Joshua Burgoyne on water policy priorities and climate resilience, sparking discussion on balancing growth and environmental protection

YWP led Great Debate, increased YWP volunteer skills and networks, North Queensland Conference welcomed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers and delegates, increase in Regional Hubs for the Industry Breakfast and Technical Events

Branch-led Ministerial Roundtable with Hon Rose Jackson reconnected members with regional challenges, influencing engagement with the NSW Skills Minister and shaping future policy collaboration



### HOW OUR VOLUNTEERS HELP

Governance	Networks	Content	Programs
Board, Strategic Advisory Council	Branch committees, event program committees, Specialist Network committees	Water e-Journal Tditorial Committee, volunteer contributors for Current magazine and podcasts, conference paper reviewers	Mentoring panels, awards judging, awards Interdependent Advisory Committee (IAP), advisory roles, member focus groups





# BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

AWA's business performance in FY25 tells a story of resilience and transition. As we closed out Strategy'25, the Association delivered a surplus against a deficit budget, maintained healthy reserves, and advanced major digital and cultural investments. These achievements were underpinned by disciplined financial management, strong Ozwater results, and a focus on delivering new member services while building the platforms and capability needed for the future.

Membership performance reflected both strengths and challenges. Retention was strong at the top tiers, individual membership grew, and upgrades to higher levels reached record numbers. At the same time, attrition at lower tiers and uneven local event revenues we are working to better understand and strengthen.

Beyond numbers, FY25 was marked by the development of Strategy 2030 through extensive consultation with members, staff and partners. The strategy sets a bold course for the next five years, centred on system change, cross-sector collaboration and capability. Staff culture and capability also advanced significantly, ensuring the organisation is prepared to deliver.

Together, these outcomes demonstrate an organisation that is stable, member-driven and ready to move confidently into its next strategic chapter.



# Membership

Membership remains the foundation of AWA's business model, and FY25 delivered both strong results and clear lessons.

Individual membership grew by 7%, reflecting the appeal of AWA's networks, events and professional development for those entering or advancing in the sector. At the premium end, retention was flawless: Principal, Platinum and Gold members all renewed, while a record number of corporate upgrades demonstrated the link between strong engagement and long-term loyalty.

Corporate membership told a more complex story. AWA attracted 88 new corporate members but this was offset by 88 departures, leaving overall numbers unchanged. While some exits reflected sector consolidation or organisations leaving the industry, many came from Silver and Bronze tiers, where engagement is often limited to Ozwater discounts. This attrition underlines an enduring challenge: lower-tier members are harder to retain without more tailored pathways to value and targeted engagement.

Feedback this year, gathered through Strategy 2030 consultations and Ozwater evaluation, reinforced the strengths of AWA's model. Members consistently value opportunities for networking, collaboration and connection, rating them highly for both importance and effectiveness. Ozwater testimonials again showed how these experiences create professional and organisational value well beyond the event itself.

Taken together, FY25's membership performance reflects strength at the top, growth in individual engagement, and challenges in sustaining lower tiers. With Strategy 2030 providing a mandate to innovate, the focus now is on creating more inclusive pathways that deliver relevance and value.

## GROWTH AT A GLANCE

**+7%**  
growth in individual members

**88**  
new corporate members with 88 departures

**100%**  
retention at Principal, Platinum and Gold tiers

**24**  
corporate upgrades

# Strategy 2030

A defining achievement of FY25 was the development of AWA's new five-year strategic plan – Strategy 2030. Work began in October 2024, led by the Board and executive team with support from consultant Belinda Moore. Engagement with staff and members ensured the plan reflected both external pressures and the priorities of the AWA community.

It is also AWA's most highly consulted strategy to date, shaped through multiple rounds of engagement – including four Board workshops, four member sessions across branches and volunteer networks, four staff engagements, and a member and stakeholder survey that attracted around 1,000 responses.

This process unfolded alongside the final delivery of Strategy'25, which focused on digital uplift and member value. As that strategy closed, attention turned to setting a bold longer- term course, marking the transition to a new era.

At its core, the plan sets three interconnected priorities:

- Inspire System Change: influence policy, support climate resilience, and raise public awareness of water's essential role.
- Cross-Sector Collaboration: expand partnerships across industry, government and community to generate tangible outcomes.

- Lead Capability Building: develop people, programs and digital resources to equip the sector for future challenges.

These priorities are enabled by investment in digital platforms, advocacy capacity, climate-aligned practices, and volunteer engagement. They respond to major external drivers – climate disruption, infrastructure investment, and demand for and digital services – while building on AWA's strength as a trusted connector.

Strategy 2030 also signals a shift in positioning: from connector to catalyst. Year 1 will focus on embedding the major technology platforms delivered under Strategy'25, including the Careers in Water and Mentoring Platforms, Indigo (digital library) and the Event and Member Hubs, ensuring members see value and impact from the outset.

# Our people

AWA's business performance is inseparable from the contribution of its staff. In FY25, staff were deeply involved in shaping both the delivery of Strategy'25 and the development of Strategy 2030. Their input ensured that new platforms, programs and policies were grounded in operational realities and member needs.

Culture was a particular focus. Through an internal values workshop initiative, staff engaged in discussions to define new values and behaviours, laying the groundwork for the culture needed to execute Strategy 2030. A Culture Design Reference Group also brought staff voices into planning, ensuring readiness for the organisational change ahead.

The results are evident in staff engagement and capability. AWA measured an increase of +9 in its organisational capability maturity score, compared to a target of +1 and a stretch target of +2. This significant uplift reflects not only the success of Strategy'25 investments in systems and processes but also the cultural alignment achieved through staff-led work.

By investing in culture and capability, AWA has improved its ability to deliver value to members and to adapt to the challenges ahead.

# Financial performance

AWA closed FY25 in a stronger financial position than expected. The year ended with a surplus of \$52K, a significant achievement from the Board-approved deficit budget. This was driven largely by the strong performance of Ozwater'25, combined with disciplined financial management across the organisation. Importantly, reserves remained steady at \$8.2M, and no drawdown was required despite significant investment in strategic projects.

Total revenue reached \$11.3M, down slightly from \$12.0M in the previous year. This downward shift was expected, as Ozwater was hosted in Adelaide where the smaller venue capacity limited both delegate numbers and exhibition size compared to the prior year. Within this, sponsorship and membership income grew (up 19% and 7% respectively), but government grants declined. On the expense side, tighter cost control was evident and overall spending was also lower in line with the reduced income: marketing costs were reduced by 19% and travel by 30%. These savings offset higher IT spend (up 60% to \$768K) and an increase of contractor costs to \$363K, both reflecting strategic investments.

Over the three years of Strategy'25, AWA invested \$3.3M in uplifting IT infrastructure, strengthening both member-facing services and internal systems. These investments, while significant, have positioned the organisation for greater efficiency and member value in the years ahead.

Challenges included revenue shortfalls in some local events and membership, requiring resource reallocation and closer cost monitoring. Nevertheless, AWA's financial resilience was sustained, with the organisation delivering a modest surplus.

We invested millions of dollars across strategic initiatives across the organisation, and we did it without touching reserves. This reflects not only fiscal discipline but a commitment to use member resources strategically. Reserves are being actively invested to strengthen AWA's capacity to serve its purpose while ensuring we are able to sustain the business in the long term.

## FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

**\$52K**  
surplus vs deficit budget

reserves stable at  
**\$8.2M**

**\$11.3M**  
revenue  
(vs \$12M FY24)

**+19%**  
sponsorship revenue growth

**+7%**  
membership revenue growth

**\$1.8M**  
invested in strategy in FY25



