

AUSTRALIAN WATER

ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REVIEW 2025-26





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

FY26 was the year Strategy 2030 began to take shape in our work at the Australian Water Association.

Our renewed purpose, to inspire, connect and transform the water community, calls on AWA to build on its strengths as a member association while becoming more deliberate about the wider impact we can create. We began putting that ambition into practice by strengthening our voice, broadening collaboration and investing in the capability to deliver in new ways.

It was a year of early action and foundation-building, supported by the continued strength of our core work. We delivered the events, networks, programs and trusted information our members value while preparing the organisation for its next stage. That balance between delivering today and preparing for tomorrow is at the heart of this Annual Review.

Our members remained central to that progress. Net membership grew by 13.7%, our strongest result to date, and overall member satisfaction rose to 84%. Members also reported stronger perceptions of value and an improved experience with AWA. These results encourage us to keep listening and improving.

Across Australia, our Branches recorded more than 15,000 event registrations, while Specialist Networks and Young Water Professionals connected people around shared interests and challenges. Ozwater'26 brought a record 6,516 participants to Brisbane, including delegates and visitors from 48 countries, for conversations spanning resilience, governance, intergenerational equity and First Peoples' knowledge.

We began extending those connections into new areas of work. Connected by Water brought leaders from water and adjacent sectors together, while the Circular Water Taskforce advanced practical work on Australia's circular water economy.

The National Policy Forum, Member Insights Meetings and our contribution to the Productivity Commission's National Water Reform Inquiry helped build a more proactive, evidence-based national voice.

Our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan established commitments to strengthen First Peoples' leadership and

participation. National Water Week expanded community understanding of water, reaching a national television audience for the first time.

We launched Indigo to make AWA's knowledge easier to use, engaged 1,648 tertiary students through Careers in Water and connected 286 mentoring pairs through the National Mentoring Program.

None of this happens without people. Our volunteers contribute expertise and countless hours across AWA's work, while our partners broaden the perspectives and capabilities we can draw upon. The AWA team delivered an extensive national program while helping the Association prepare for what comes next. We are deeply grateful for their commitment.

We undertook this work from a position of financial strength. AWA achieved a \$597,000 operating return while delivering its core services and investing \$1.6 million in strategic activities. Healthy reserves provide resilience and allow us to invest deliberately in work that creates value for members and supports our purpose.

Much of what began in FY26 is still taking shape. Our next task is to embed this work, complete outstanding commitments and demonstrate more clearly how AWA contributes to meaningful change. We enter that phase with a growing membership, strong engagement and a clear sense of purpose.

I invite you to explore the stories, achievements and people captured in this Annual Review. Together, they show an Association evolving with its community and building the influence, knowledge and connections needed to advance a sustainable water future.

Corinne Cheeseman
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Water Association

Our purpose

To inspire, connect and transform the water sector.

Our vision

A sustainable water future.

About us

The Australian Water Association (AWA) is Australia's leading not-for-profit organisation connecting water professionals and organisations to share knowledge, build capability and advance a sustainable water future.

Our community brings together people from across utilities, government, consulting, research, industry and communities, creating connections across disciplines, sectors and geographies. Through advocacy, knowledge sharing, professional development, events and collaboration, AWA provides a platform for the water community to exchange expertise, strengthen relationships and work together on the challenges and opportunities shaping Australia's water future.

With more than 5,500 members, including 600 corporate members and 1,200 Young Water Professionals, as well as eight state and territory Branches and 11 Specialist Networks, our strength lies in the breadth of the community we bring together.

Strategy 2030

FY26 marked the beginning of a new strategic chapter for AWA. Strategy 2030 represents a fundamental shift towards becoming a purpose and impact-led association, with an ambitious role to inspire, connect and transform the water community. It broadens how AWA works with members and stakeholders to create value, strengthen influence and respond to challenges including climate pressures, population growth, infrastructure renewal and changing community expectations.

The strategy reflects a shift in emphasis: from measuring success primarily through the activities we deliver towards being more deliberate about the value and impact those activities create.

Strategy 2030 focuses that ambition through three interconnected strategic pillars:

Inspire system change: Drive long-term, sector-wide change to address critical water challenges in a changing climate.

Foster cross-sector collaboration: Inspire connection both within and beyond the water sector to drive innovation and positive change.

Grow sector capability: Strengthen sector capability by developing people, resources and tools to meet future challenges.

Achieving these ambitions requires more than a strategic direction. Strategy 2030 identifies four enabling foundations that will strengthen AWA's ability to deliver:

Data-driven decisions: Using research, insights and technologies to inform evidence-based decisions.

Personalised experience: Delivering tailored, seamless experiences across member and stakeholder touchpoints.

High-performance culture: Fostering a strong, future-focused culture committed to delivering impact.

Sustainable business: Operating a sustainable model and reinvesting in high-impact initiatives.

Delivery is powered by the contribution of AWA members, volunteers, partners and staff – bringing together sector expertise, community connection and organisational capability to turn strategic ambition into action.

FY26 at a glance

13.7%

net membership growth
AWA's highest growth to date



84%

overall member satisfaction
Up from 78% in 2024 and 72% in 2022



\$13.7M

total revenue
With a \$597K operating return

3

submissions to the National Water Reform Inquiry
Informed by National Policy Forum Outcomes Paper



6,516

Ozwater'26 attendees
A record result, including 463 international attendees



\$1.6M

invested
In the first year of Strategy 2030



424,000

AWA website visitors
Up 121% year-on-year



1,648

tertiary students engaged
Through Careers in Water, up 194%



286

National Mentoring Program pairs
With 96% rating their experience good or excellent



15,158

Branch event registrations
With attendance by new members up 20%



Inspire System Change



AWA will drive long-term, sector-wide change to address critical water challenges in a changing climate.

FY26 marked an important step in strengthening AWA's role as a national voice for water, supported by new investment in advocacy, reconciliation and community water knowledge.

Across this work, a consistent approach emerged through bringing different perspectives into the conversation, building a strong evidence base and drawing on the collective knowledge of the water community to influence lasting change.

Building a stronger voice for water

Members have been clear that they want AWA to play a stronger role in advocating on the issues shaping the future of water. In FY26, the Association responded by beginning a significant uplift of its advocacy capability, laying the foundations for a more proactive and evidence-based approach to influencing policy.

This included investing in advocacy leadership, establishing clearer processes for prioritising submissions and engaging subject matter experts, and mapping the government and sector relationships needed to support longer-term influence. AWA also established [water governance, water equity and water security](#) as three priority advocacy themes, providing a clearer framework for focusing member expertise, policy submissions and engagement with decision-makers.

Central to this emerging approach is AWA's ability to bring different perspectives together, capture the knowledge generated and translate it into practical policy input. The return of the National Policy Forum in Canberra in March 2026 provided an early demonstration of how this can work.

Polymakers, regulators, community leaders and water sector executives came together to examine whether Australia's policy and governance frameworks adequately recognise the many values water provides. Through six keynote presentations and three facilitated workshops, participants explored the

systemic factors contributing to gaps in existing policy and governance, including how economic, environmental, social, cultural and intergenerational values are weighed in decision-making.

These discussions were captured in the [National Policy Forum Outcomes Paper](#) highlighting how fragmented responsibilities, short-term planning horizons and implicit trade-offs can affect long-term resilience, service equity and trust in water decisions.

The Outcomes Paper informed AWA's participation in the Productivity Commission's National Water Reform Inquiry, including three submissions made across the inquiry process. Member Insights Meetings added further depth, giving members a direct avenue to contribute their experience and expertise as AWA's policy positions developed.

One proposition gaining momentum through this work is the need to recognise water as enabling infrastructure. Member insights reinforced that water underpins priorities extending well beyond the sector, including housing, productivity, net zero and data centre development, but is too often considered only after major planning and investment decisions have been made.

AWA continued to advance this perspective through its submission to Parliament Australia about creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia, as well as through government and sector forums, including the NSW Minister's Roundtable and Heads of Water. At the NSW roundtable, discussion of the water implications of data centre development led to a request for AWA to contribute to Infrastructure NSW's Data Centre Consultation Paper, creating a direct avenue for sector expertise to inform government planning.

These activities point towards the advocacy role envisaged under Strategy 2030: using AWA's convening strength not simply to create conversations, but to capture the knowledge within them and turn it into evidence, resources and policy solutions that can influence change.



3 submissions to the National Water Reform Inquiry

Insights from the National Policy Forum, captured in an Outcomes Paper and strengthened through Member Insights Meetings, helped translate water community expertise into practical policy input.

Working towards reconciliation

FY26 marked a significant step in AWA's reconciliation journey, with the Association launching its [Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan](#) (RAP) during the year.

The Innovate RAP follows the successful completion of AWA's first Reflect RAP, which established the foundations for reconciliation focused activities across the Association. Through that initial stage, AWA strengthened its understanding of reconciliation, built relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and identified how its role as a national association could support meaningful change across its organisation and the wider water community.

Drawing on this progress and learning, the Innovate RAP sets out a more ambitious and practical program of action. It embeds reconciliation more deeply across AWA's relationships, programs, events, policies and organisational practices, with commitments structured around relationships, respect, opportunities and governance.

Its actions include strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and organisations, increasing cultural learning among AWA employees, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and procurement, and creating more opportunities for First Peoples' leadership and participation across AWA's programs.

It also formalises commitments to prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers and thought leaders at major events and include sessions led by First Peoples experts on water management.

AWA began putting this approach into practice through its events and programs. At Ozwater'26, the Association continued working with Traditional Owners to incorporate cultural protocols and elevate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives within the national water conversation.

The development and launch of the Innovate RAP represents a shift from establishing AWA's reconciliation foundations to pursuing measurable action. It provides a framework for stronger relationships, greater participation and First Peoples' leadership in AWA's work and in conversations about water and Country.

Bringing water into focus

Community understanding of water is another important part of inspiring long-term change. In FY26, National Water Week invited Australians to Bring Water Into Focus, encouraging communities to recognise the often unseen role water plays in everyday life and creating opportunities for the sector to speak with a more unified voice about its value.

Participation grew substantially. [National Water Week](#) achieved a social media reach of 2.6 million, generating 4,500 interactions as organisations across the water sector and beyond amplified the campaign. Six state government Ministers also contributed tailored video messages about the importance of water and National Water Week.

AWA's Water Ambassadors also took the conversation directly into classrooms, with 43 ambassadors engaging 15 schools and helping students connect water with their own lives, aspirations and communities. And more than 17,500 entries were received through poster competitions across Victoria, New South Wales, the ACT and Queensland, up from about 5,000 the previous year.

For the first time, National Water Week also reached a national television audience through three Better Homes and Gardens features, with this work led by Sydney Water in partnership with AWA. The television features extended water conversations beyond traditional sector channels and into Australian homes.

The campaign provides a strong foundation for AWA's broader strategic ambition to improve water literacy. Future work will build on that reach through new school resources, an expanded poster competition and tools designed for primary schools, secondary schools and workplaces.

More than 17,500 poster competition entries

Entries across Victoria, New South Wales, the ACT and Queensland were more than three times the previous year's total.

43 Water Ambassadors engaged

15 schools

The campaign also reached a national television audience for the first time through three Better Homes and Gardens features, with this work led by Sydney Water in partnership with AWA.

Sharing trusted water knowledge

FY26 marked the launch of [Indigo](#), a platform designed to make AWA's extensive body of water knowledge easier to find, access and use. Bringing together technical content, event resources and publications that previously sat across different AWA channels, Indigo was created to help water professionals discover relevant information in one place and return to it long after it was first shared.

Pre-launch communications generated 600 leads from potential members, and, from launch, the platform attracted around 3,400 users and more than 40,000 interactions, with Ozwater emerging as its most searched channel. This strong early uptake, including interest from beyond AWA's membership, pointed to a broader appetite for trusted sector knowledge that is easier to discover and revisit.

AWA's regular publications and digital channels also continued to connect members and the wider sector with trusted information, research and perspectives through Source, Current, Water e-Journal, podcasts and reports.

Engagement across AWA's digital ecosystem grew strongly during FY26, with 424,000 website visitors, up 121% year-on-year, and 2.7 million website events and interactions, an increase of 53%. Source continued to perform strongly, with its average open rate increasing by 1.3%, while its click-through rate stayed steady. Readers engaged most with content spanning sector policy, innovation, infrastructure and emerging challenges, with popular stories covering PFAS regulation, desalination, national water reform and the growing water demands associated with AI data centres.

AWA's podcast maintained its audience year-on-year, while Current recorded increased engagement. The Water e-Journal continued to provide a platform for peer-reviewed technical knowledge, publishing 11 technical papers, alongside 40 student summaries during FY26.

Together, these platforms meet different member needs – immediacy (Source), depth (Current), accessibility (Podcast), and academic credibility (WeJ). Sustained or growing engagement across the portfolio demonstrates their continuing value as trusted sources of information for AWA members and the wider water community.

424,000 website visitors – up 121%
AWA's digital ecosystem recorded 2.7 million events and interactions, an increase of 53% year-on-year.

Indigo attracted 3,400 users and more than 40,000 interactions following launch

The early results point to growing demand for trusted water knowledge that is easier to find, use and revisit.



19

actions across relationships, respect, opportunities & governance

With clear responsibilities and delivery timeframes, AWA's Innovate RAP provides a practical framework for embedding reconciliation across its workplace, partnerships, programs and influence within the water sector.

Foster Cross-Sector Collaboration



AWA will inspire connection both within and beyond the water sector to drive innovation and positive change.

Some of the water sector's most difficult challenges cannot be solved by one organisation, discipline or sector. Throughout FY26, AWA created opportunities for people to bring different experiences to the table through national and local events, Specialist Networks, international partnerships and initiatives designed around shared challenges.

The emphasis is on what those connections make possible: stronger relationships, greater exchange of knowledge and practical collaboration that continues after the conversation ends.

Creating space for connection and challenge

AWA's national events continued to provide some of the water community's largest meeting points in FY26, connecting practitioners, leaders, researchers, businesses, government and international partners around the issues shaping water's future.

Ozwater'26 in Brisbane welcomed a record 6,516 attendees, including 2,104 delegates and 463 international attendees from 48 countries. Its largest technical program to date featured more than 400 technical presenters and 49 workshops and panels spanning innovation, resilience, policy, regulation, circularity and emerging approaches to water management. The scale of the event was matched by a strong attendee response. Ozwater'26 recorded a Net Promoter Score of +52, with 90.4% of respondents satisfied with their overall experience. Networking and the Exhibition Hall were the highest-rated aspects of the event, each recording 95.9% satisfaction.

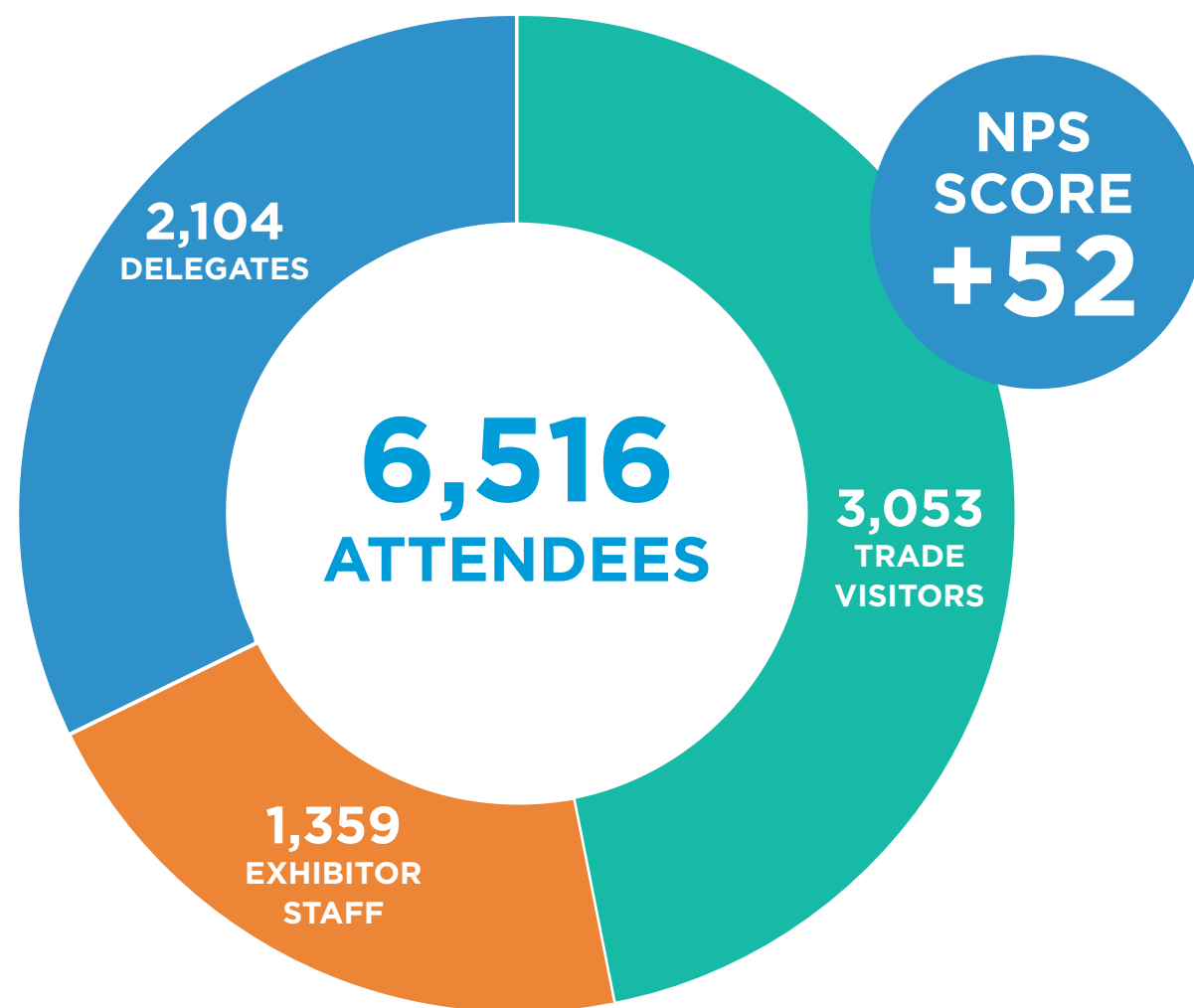
Ozwater'26 also coincided with National Reconciliation Week, creating further opportunities to elevate First Peoples' knowledge and leadership. A First Nations Artist in Residence, cultural ceremonies and sessions exploring Aboriginal science, cultural capability and the relationship between different knowledge systems extended reconciliation across the conference experience.



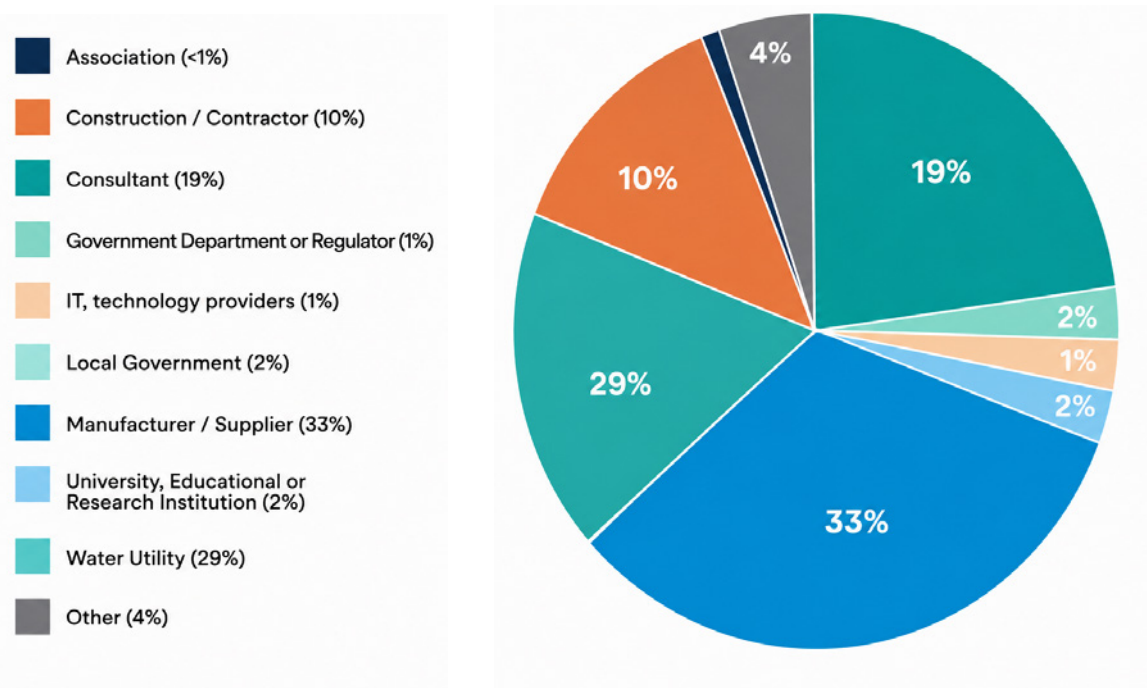
“Ozwater is where the water industry's best conversations happen and real change begins.”
Melissa Bowerman

“Ozwater continues to be the premier event to attend in the water industry, given the broad range of papers and networking opportunities.”
Troy Pettiford

Ozwater'26 Insights & Highlights



Attendees by Type of Organisation



Beyond its scale, Ozwater continued to evolve as a forum for constructive challenge. This was particularly evident in the Water Leaders Forum, which explored intergenerational equity through a new format combining senior and emerging perspectives. Two keynote presentations were followed by facilitated table discussions, with 20 Young Water Professionals invited to participate alongside senior leaders for the first time. Their involvement brought the people who will inherit today's decisions directly into a conversation about what current leaders can do to support the water leaders of the future.

The Directors Forum also continued to provide a dedicated space for Board Directors to engage with key issues facing the sector and undertake professional development while at Ozwater'26. The panel explored why governance and risk models must evolve to keep pace with an increasingly complex and changing operating environment.

Earlier in the year, Connected by Water 2026 in Perth set out more deliberately to extend collaboration beyond the traditional boundaries of the water sector. With more than 500 attendees, the conference brought water professionals together with representatives from mining, agriculture, food, infrastructure, research and government around circularity, climate resilience, regional development and infrastructure investment. The

program itself was co-designed with representatives from adjacent sectors, helping shift the event from inviting others into a water-sector conversation towards developing the conversation with them.

Early outcomes suggest those connections are beginning to travel beyond the conference. Connected by Water led to new relationships with organisations and sectors not traditionally engaged with AWA and further collaboration around national data sharing, circular economy work and regional infrastructure challenges. A Victorian roundtable subsequently brought together more than 20 system thinkers, including councils, community organisations, farmers and First Peoples groups, to continue discussion around water, climate and regenerative approaches.

International knowledge exchange was also central to the Water Efficiency Conference 2025, delivered in partnership with the International Water Association. The event attracted 224 delegates and 124 speakers, with significant international attendance. Utilities, researchers, consultants, government and technology providers shared practical approaches to conservation, demand management and water efficiency, supported by site tours and implementation-focused case studies.



Connected by Water 2026

>500
participants

Participation across water, mining, agriculture, food, infrastructure, research and government
More than 20 system thinkers joined a subsequent Victorian roundtable

Water Efficiency Conference 2025

124
speakers

224
delegates

Almost
30% of
speakers
joined from
overseas

Connecting communities

Across the country, AWA's Branches continued to provide locally relevant opportunities for members to learn, connect and exchange ideas, recording 15,158 event registrations during FY26. Branch events also reached more people across the AWA community, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendance increasing by 5% and attendance by new members increasing by 20% compared with FY25.

While Branch events connect members geographically, [AWA's Specialist Networks](#) connect members nation-wide around areas of shared technical expertise and sector interest. Overseen by multidisciplinary volunteer committees, the Networks create communities where practitioners can exchange knowledge, explore emerging challenges and contribute to broader industry conversations.

FY26 saw the establishment of the Beyond Zero Specialist Network, bringing together expertise in emissions modelling, monitoring and wastewater treatment to support practical sector-wide approaches to decarbonisation. Built around a Model-Measure-Mitigate framework, the Network is helping practitioners develop a shared understanding of priorities including process nitrous oxide, fugitive methane, consistent emissions accounting and shared data.

Across the broader Specialist Network community, Member Circles, workshops and collaborative projects helped knowledge move between organisations, disciplines and jurisdictions. Networks shared lessons from established desalination and water recycling schemes, advanced conversations about source control and safe reuse, and brought operations and asset management

practitioners together around ageing infrastructure, safety and workforce training.

Specialist Networks also connected Australian practitioners with international expertise and encouraged collaboration among utilities, regulators, researchers, consultants and technology providers. This work helped members apply evidence and experience to emerging challenges, while creating stronger links between technical practice, research, policy and advocacy. By turning specialist knowledge into shared learning and practical industry priorities, AWA's Specialist Networks are strengthening sector capability and helping inform more resilient, sustainable water management.

Learning across borders

AWA's [International Development Partnerships](#) demonstrated how sustained exchange can strengthen both relationships and practical capability. Delivered with the Pacific Water and Wastewater Association and funded by the Asian Development Bank, the Pacific Water Knowledge Exchange and Partnership Program connected Solomon Water, Tonga Water Board and Vanuatu's Department of Water Resources with Australian utilities, technical experts, researchers and regional partners.

Rather than relying on one-off training, the program combined three study tours – in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Australia – with six regional webinars, mentoring and targeted technical exchanges. Learning priorities were identified with the participating utilities and ranged from customer service and non-revenue water to workforce development, financial management, climate resilience and inclusive practice. The webinar program alone attracted almost 300

unique registrants from across Pacific and Australian utilities, government agencies and sector partners.

The value was particularly evident in the practical exchanges. In Vanuatu, participants worked alongside local teams, visited infrastructure and shared approaches to operations and maintenance, customer engagement and risk. Peer learning between Pacific utilities was repeatedly identified by participants as one of its greatest strengths. The program culminated at Ozwater'26, where Pacific participants joined delegations from Cambodia and Australia for workshops, site visits and collaborative problem-solving. All respondents to the final study-tour survey said the experience met or exceeded expectations, while every respondent who answered the question about applying their learning reported feeling more confident doing so within their organisation.

AWA also continued its longer-standing work with Cambodia through the Cambodia-Australia Water Partnership Program, supported by the Australian Government through its Cambodia Australia Partnership for Resilient Economic Development (CAPRED) program. The partnership connects Svay Rieng Water Utility, Steung Treng Water Utility and Cambodia's Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation with Australian partners including Busselton Water, Townsville City Council and Veolia. Study tours, technical workshops and mentoring provide opportunities to share practical approaches to water service delivery and strengthen professional relationships.

The wider international program also brought together more than 70 participants from across the Asia-Pacific to develop the [Ozwater'26 Asia-Pacific Water Resilience Joint Statement](#). Reflecting shared regional priorities, the statement called for greater investment in long-term water resilience,

stronger regional collaboration, inclusive leadership and community-centred approaches, carrying the exchange at Ozwater'26 into a collective call for sustained action.

Collaboration to action

The [Circular Water Taskforce](#) grew out of AWA's first Connected by Water conference in 2024. Established with Circular Australia, it gives the cross-sector conversations started there a program of work: identifying what prevents circular water approaches from being adopted at scale and bringing the right organisations in to address those barriers.

Its priorities include increasing water reuse and recycling, creating greater value from biosolids and biochar, integrating water into precinct planning, and developing stronger business cases and investment pathways. The Taskforce also aims to inform national policy and identify opportunities for water, energy, nutrients and other resources to be used across sectors. These priorities provide a practical basis for work that can make a material difference.

During FY26, the Taskforce advanced its flagship report, [Accelerating Australia's Circular Water Economy](#), in partnership with Arup and SUEZ. The report examines the regulatory, commercial, environmental and cultural barriers to circular water markets, as well as opportunities to attract investment and bring solutions to scale. At Ozwater'26, the Taskforce brought together perspectives from utilities, policy and finance to discuss the work. This progression from a conference conversation to defined priorities shows the Taskforce's intended role: turning shared ambition into actions that can change policy, investment and practice.

Connection across the country

15,158 Branch event participants

Attendance by new members increased 20%

Attendance by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people increased

Expertise in action

25 member circles

9 Ozwater'26 panels and workshops

AWA's Specialist Networks connected members through 25 circles of shared expertise and helped shape nine panels and workshops at Ozwater'26, bringing specialist knowledge into the national program.



International impact

5

international study tours

Study tours with Pacific (Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa), Indonesian, Cambodian and Australian partners combined site-based learning with mentoring, technical exchange and collaborative problem-solving.

6

Pacific-region webinars

Almost 300 unique registrants joined from Pacific and Australian utilities, government agencies and sector partners.

8

webinars for Cambodian utilities

focusing on resilience, water quality and source water protection, asset management and financial planning

Grow Sector Capability



AWA will strengthen sector capability by developing people, resources and tools to meet future challenges.

A capable water sector depends on more than technical expertise. People need access to trusted knowledge, opportunities to develop and share their skills, clear pathways into and through the sector, and connections with others who can help them grow.

During FY26, AWA invested across that spectrum, opening up access to its extensive knowledge base, strengthening career and mentoring pathways, supporting emerging leadership and recognising the people whose contributions demonstrate the breadth and strength of capability across Australia's water community.

Opening up water knowledge

Years of conferences, technical papers, research and publications have created an extensive body of knowledge within AWA. Launched in FY26, [Indigo](#) is helping extend the value of that knowledge by making it easier for water professionals to find, revisit and apply.

By bringing technical content, event resources and publications into a central platform, Indigo allows important insights to remain accessible long after an event has finished or an article was first published. This supports continuing professional learning and gives knowledge developed across the sector a longer and more useful life.

The launch represents the first stage in a longer-term ambition to create access to historical AWA material and progressively expand the knowledge available through Indigo, alongside opportunities to incorporate trusted information from beyond AWA and introduce more sophisticated search capabilities.

Rather than knowledge remaining tied to a particular event, publication or point in time, Indigo creates the foundation for an enduring sector resource, one that can grow alongside the challenges water professionals are working to solve.

Knowledge with a longer life

Indigo brings technical content, event resources and publications into one central platform, helping water professionals find, revisit and apply trusted knowledge long after it was first shared.



Building pathways into water

Building the workforce the water community needs starts with making its opportunities visible. During FY26, Careers in Water continued to build awareness of the breadth of roles available across the sector and create clearer pathways for students, job seekers and people considering a career change.

The program engaged 1,648 tertiary students, up 194% compared to the previous year, while traffic to the Careers in Water website increased by 39.5%. Twenty-five career profiles were added, mapping opportunities across the sector from operators and engineers to digital and IT roles, alongside a growing collection of resources designed to make career pathways easier to understand.

We also established partnerships to extend that reach into new audiences. Through Explore Careers, Australia's largest early-career and employment platform, Careers in Water reached 3,220 unique users during the year, while collaboration with Water Directorates supported career pathway resources in Queensland and New South Wales.

Careers and workforce topics were also integrated into AWA events, webinars, workshops and conference presentations. FY26 represented a foundation-building year for the program. With greater awareness, resources and partnerships now in place, Careers in Water is moving into its next phase – strengthening pathways into the sector, creating more opportunities for industry to engage directly with students and reaching career changers and underrepresented groups.

Making water careers more visible

1,648

tertiary students engaged - Up 194% from 560 in FY25

42,144

Careers in Water website visitors - Up 39.5% year-on-year

25

new career profiles highlighting opportunities spanning operations, engineering, digital technology and IT

3,220

unique users reached through Explore Careers making the breadth of opportunities more visible to students and job seekers

Backing ideas with potential

The **Chris Davis AM Fellowship** continued to support emerging leadership and innovative thinking by giving water professionals an opportunity to develop ideas with the potential for broader sector application.

2025 Fellow **Leslie Golds**, under the guidance of Gomeroin Professor **Phil Duncan**, brought together Aboriginal science, circular design and climate adaptation through the **Gunimaa and Gali Waratah Tool**, a framework designed to support more meaningful inclusion of Traditional Owner perspectives in water planning and decision-making.

The Fellowship helped take that thinking into a practical setting, with an interactive workshop at Ozwater'26 giving participants the opportunity to apply the tool to real-world project scenarios, demonstrating how its principles could inform approaches to water and coastal projects.

By giving emerging leaders support to develop and share their thinking, the program creates opportunities for promising ideas to move beyond an individual's work and contribute to broader sector knowledge and practice.

Celebrating excellence

Building sector capability also means recognising the people already advancing water practice and making their achievements visible to the wider community.

Across the country, AWA's state and territory awards programs celebrated the professionals, projects and organisations making significant contributions to their local water communities.

Winners from these programs progressed to become finalists in the Australian Water Awards, bringing together an exceptional field of talent from across Australia for national recognition at Ozwater'26.

Across 10 national award categories, the 2026 Australian Water Awards recognised excellence spanning professional leadership, research, infrastructure, safety, customer experience and emerging talent. Interest in the Awards extended well beyond the ceremony.

AWA also recognised sustained service and leadership within its own community. At the Ozwater'26 President's Dinner, **Dr Sandra Hall** received AWA's Exceptional Service Award – the Association's highest honour for outstanding service to AWA and its members.

Tom Mollenkopf AO and **Gary Crisp** received Lifetime Achievement Awards recognising their enduring contributions to the Association and water community.

Together, these forms of recognition do more than celebrate individual achievement. From state and territory awards through to national recognition, they make excellence visible, share examples of leadership and innovation within the water community.

ASSOCIATION

AUSTRALIAN WATER AWARDS



1,966 views

AWA's coverage of Australian Water Awards finalists and winners is consistently among its most popular content, with [Meet the 2026 Australian Water Awards finalists](#) the most-read AWA article in FY26.



Dr Sandra Hall
Exceptional Service Award



Tom Mollenkopf AO
Lifetime Achievement Award



Gary Crisp
Lifetime Achievement Award



MENTEE | JOHN NGUYEN

“The program helped me build confidence in my own professional journey.”

MENTOR | GAVIN FLOOD

“Many of our discussions prompted me to reflect on my own experiences and how I approach different situations in my work.”

Developing the next generation

AWA continued to support emerging water professionals through professional development, networking, mentoring, university engagement and opportunities to contribute to the wider sector.

The **Young Water Professionals** community grew from 1,347 to 1,633 members during FY26, with more than 20 events attracting over 1,500 attendees nationally. At Ozwater'26, 130 YWPs participated in the dedicated YWP Program, including speed networking with Water Leaders, while a further 20 joined Water Leaders Forum discussions on intergenerational equity and how today's leaders can support the water leaders of the future.

This strong connection was reflected in the 2026 Member Survey. YWPs recorded a Brand Index of 74.79 – the highest of any age group – while satisfaction with AWA communications increased from 58% in 2024 to 80% in 2026. YWPs were also

AWA's most highly engaged age cohort across events, conferences, awards, online events, Specialist Networks and mentoring.

Mentoring provided another important pathway for professional and leadership development. The first year of AWA's **National Mentoring Program** connected 286 mentoring pairs across Australia, with 16% of participants based in regional locations and 96% rating their experience good or excellent.

By connecting people beyond their immediate organisations and disciplines, the program helped mentees build confidence, networks and career direction, while enabling mentors to share experience and knowledge with the next generation. Together, these initiatives are creating stronger pathways for emerging professionals to connect, develop and contribute.

AWA will continue to expand access to mentoring, professional development and student engagement, while creating more opportunities for emerging professionals to contribute to the conversations shaping the sector's future.

Supporting Young Water Professionals

1,633
YOUNG WATER PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS
- up from 1,347 in FY25

>20 YWP EVENTS
- more than 1,500 attendances nationally

130 YWPS JOINED THE DEDICATED OZWATER'26 PROGRAM

Mentoring across Australia

286

MENTORING PAIRS

16%

REGIONAL PARTICIPATION

90%

RATED THE EXPERIENCE GOOD OR EXCELLENT

Progress on how we deliver

The first year of Strategy 2030 combined early delivery across AWA's strategic priorities with substantial work inside the Association to support longer-term impact.

Alongside progressing the strategy's Year One commitments, AWA began strengthening the people, systems, processes, technology and data needed to deliver its ambitions. This work was guided by four enabling priorities: data-driven decisions, personalised experience, high-performance culture and sustainable business.

Together, these areas provide a stronger basis for AWA to understand where it creates value, respond more effectively to members and stakeholders, and measure its contribution to change across the water sector.

Strategic delivery

FY26 marked the first year of Strategy 2030, with AWA moving from strategy development into delivery. By year end, seven of the ten Year One KPIs set by the Board had been achieved, with several targets exceeded.

The results showed strong early progress in advocacy, sector knowledge, community water literacy, cross-sector engagement and career development. They also established new baselines that will allow AWA to track change more consistently over the life of the strategy. This is particularly important as the Association shifts its focus from measuring participation and activity towards understanding the reach, influence and impact of its work.

The three KPIs not achieved within FY26 were affected largely by timing and sequencing. Delivery of the Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan reached 75%, with most outstanding actions already scheduled for FY27. Measurement of professional development goals through the National Mentoring Program stood at 12% at 30 June because the program runs from March to December, meaning the year-end scorecard captured an early stage of delivery. Development of a broader stakeholder plan was deferred while we clarified the priority challenges, audiences and partnerships it should address.

The Strategy 2030 Year One scorecard therefore reflects both early delivery and the practical work of establishing new programs, measures and organisational foundations. In

FY27, the focus will increasingly move towards completing outstanding commitments, embedding the changes begun during FY26 and demonstrating more clearly how AWA's work contributes to sector-wide impact.

Data-driven decisions

Better use of data will help AWA understand its members, measure impact and make more informed decisions about where to focus its efforts.

During FY26, work concentrated on the digital foundations needed to support that ambition. AWA expanded its login system across digital services, improving access to Indigo and the Member Hub while creating a foundation for greater use of Single Sign-On across customer-facing services. Work also began on a target integration architecture to better connect AWA's systems and support its future data model.

At the same time, AWA strengthened the governance supporting its digital environment. An Information Security Management System was developed to improve visibility and management of cyber security risks, supported by new policies, processes and procedures governing secure access to data. Reliance on legacy operational IT infrastructure was also reduced, helping create a more scalable technology base for future digital investment.

Personalised experience

AWA continued to build a better understanding of how individual members engage with the Association, creating opportunities to respond more directly to their needs. A new member engagement score brings together information including event attendance, website visits, email interactions and Specialist Network activity.

This provides a more immediate view of engagement and helps identify members whose participation has fallen below average, enabling the membership team to prioritise personal contact and better understand where expectations may not be being met.

This work supports a broader shift towards understanding the member experience as a connected journey rather than a series of individual interactions with AWA.

High-performance culture

Delivering an ambitious strategy also requires clarity about how people work together. In early FY26, AWA launched new organisational values and behaviours aligned with its renewed purpose, to Inspire, Connect and Transform. Developed as part of AWA's culture roadmap, the behaviours were co-designed with employees to establish a shared understanding of what is expected across the organisation and support more constructive and collaborative ways of working.

This work will continue in FY27. A priority is embedding the values and behaviours into the everyday systems that shape the employee experience, including recruitment, performance and reward, and learning and development.

Sustainable business

FY26 included substantial work to determine how the Association can focus its resources where they create the greatest value and deliver that work sustainably.

During FY26, AWA examined where it should focus its efforts, how it creates value and how that work can be funded sustainably. This also involved considering the organisational structure and ways of working needed to deliver Strategy 2030.

AWA's sustained growth over the past five years, together with its new strategic direction, highlighted the need to ensure the Association's structure, systems and ways of working can support its purpose and the delivery of Strategy 2030.

Foundational work also progressed on a review of AWA's Constitution, helping ensure the Association's governance framework remains fit for purpose as its role and operating environment evolve. Most of this groundwork was completed during FY26, with member consultation taking place in FY27 ahead of a proposed new Constitution being presented at the 2026 Annual General Meeting.

Implementing and embedding the new operating model will continue into FY27, alongside work to strengthen AWA's systems, processes, data and technology foundations.

Together, these changes are intended to ensure the Association can pursue the opportunities created by Strategy 2030 in a focused and sustainable way.



Our people

AWA's ability to connect and support the water community depends on people. Across Australia in FY26, volunteers brought their time, knowledge and experience to AWA's governance, committees, networks, programs, content and events. Partners contributed complementary perspectives and capabilities, while AWA's staff connected these efforts and to turn ideas into delivery.

Together, these people make AWA possible.

Powered by volunteers

As a purpose-led association, AWA draws on the knowledge, experience and commitment of its members. Volunteers are central to its governance, help shape its priorities and extend its work across water communities throughout Australia.

During FY26, committees delivered locally relevant events, strengthened regional participation and created opportunities for professional development and connection. Their work ranged from leadership and technical events to study tours, career programs and cross-sector conferences. Volunteers also elevated First Peoples' knowledge and perspectives, supported emerging professionals and connected members with industry and decision makers.

Specialist Network volunteers brought practitioners together around technical disciplines and emerging challenges, helping

expertise move between organisations and jurisdictions. Other members shaped national conferences, reviewed abstracts and papers, assessed awards, mentored water professionals, contributed to content and shared insight through advisory groups and strategic initiatives.

Some of this work is highly visible – on stage, at events and through published content. Much more happens behind the scenes through planning, review and coordination. Together, these efforts ensure AWA's work remains grounded in the experience of people across utilities, government, research, consulting, industry and communities.

The impact extends beyond any individual activity. Events create new professional connections, mentoring builds confidence and career direction, technical reviews strengthen shared knowledge, and committee discussions bring emerging issues into wider conversations.

Volunteers also help AWA understand and respond to the needs of different parts of the water community. Their knowledge of local priorities, technical practice and emerging challenges helps keep the Association's work relevant.

To every person who gave their time, knowledge and energy to AWA during FY26, thank you. The Association and the wider water community are stronger because of your contribution.

How our volunteers help

Governance | Board, Board subcommittees, Strategic Advisory Council

Networks | Branch committees, event program committees, Specialist Network committees

Content | Water e-Journal Editorial Committee, volunteer contributors for Current magazine and podcasts, conference paper reviewers

Programs | Mentoring panels, awards judging, awards Interdependent Advisory Committee (IAP), advisory roles, member focus groups

Impact across Australia

The Branch partnered with the NT Government to bring together the 70th anniversary of Water Resources and the NT Water Awards through Water in the Bush. An inaugural YWP networking event created a new platform for emerging professionals.

Volunteers expanded the Industry Breakfast Regional Hub program from three to seven locations, broadening access for regional members. The Branch also elevated First Peoples' perspectives at every major event and welcomed the first Aboriginal woman to its committee.

Every NSW event reached capacity, reflecting strong demand for locally focused technical and professional engagement. Launch Your Career in Water connected students and emerging professionals with industry leaders and practical career pathways.



Record participation across the YWP program saw most events sell out, including professional development focused on Indigenous cultural awareness. Technical and Sundowner events extended the impact of the South Australian Water Awards by sharing insights from award-winning projects and professionals with the broader water community.

Volunteers helped deliver Connected by Water 2026, bringing water together with agriculture, energy, mining, manufacturing and data infrastructure. The WA Student Water Prize also showcased emerging research and supported the next generation of water professionals.

The Regional Study Tour achieved another early sellout, while more than 550 people attended the sold-out Victorian Gala. Volunteers also delivered a collaborative strategic foresight event and shared professional development with YWPs across four states.

Growing volunteer engagement led to the first contested elections for both Branch President and Vice President, while event participation increased across the program. An inaugural on-Country cultural burning workshop gave around 25 YWPs the opportunity to learn through First Peoples' knowledge, culture and connection to Country.

Stronger through partnership

AWA's ability to create impact also depends on relationships beyond its own membership and organisation. Across any of its programs, AWA works with a variety of industry bodies, community organisations and research institutions whose expertise and reach complement its own. Some are formal strategic partnerships, others are affiliations built around shared commitments or communities.

These relationships take different forms, but they all allow AWA and its partners to achieve things that would be more difficult to accomplish independently.

During FY26, this was evident in AWA's work with Circular Australia, which brought expertise from water and the wider circular economy together through the Circular Water Taskforce. Relationships with organisations including Pride in Water and WaterAble continued to support a water community in which more people can participate and contribute.

Four strategic agreements signed at Ozwater'26 provided further examples of partnership in action. AWA renewed agreements with the Water Services Association of Australia, Water Research Australia and Singapore International Water Week, while establishing a new partnership with British Water. Together, these relationships strengthen connections between utilities, researchers, businesses and international water communities, creating new opportunities for knowledge exchange, capability development, innovation and international engagement.

Rather than existing separately from AWA's work, these relationships are part of how that work happens, broadening the perspectives, expertise and networks available to the Association and the water community it serves.

The team behind AWA

Behind all the events, programs and partnerships is AWA's staff. It is a relatively small team delivering a national program of work across membership, events, content, advocacy, partnerships, operations and corporate services.

FY26 asked a great deal of AWA's team. Alongside delivering AWA's established programs and services, staff began putting Strategy 2030 into practice and contributed to identifying opportunities to improve processes and strengthen how the Association works.

Much of their contribution is visible, but plenty more happens out of sight, including managing systems and finances, coordinating volunteers, supporting committees, building partnerships, responding to members and doing the detailed work required to turn an idea into something the water community can use.

Thank you to the AWA team for the expertise, care and energy you brought to that work throughout FY26.



Business performance

FY26 combined strong organisational performance with the beginning of AWA's next phase of evolution under Strategy 2030. Record membership growth, improving member sentiment and the continued strength of AWA's core activities provided a solid platform for change. AWA entered a significant new investment cycle, directing resources towards strategic priorities and the organisational capabilities needed to create greater value, strengthen its influence and support broader impact across the water sector.

This investment was made from a position of financial strength. A healthy operating result and reserves allowed AWA to begin translating its strategic ambition into action while maintaining the resilience needed to manage future risks and sustain delivery over the years ahead.

A growing membership community

AWA's membership community continued to grow strongly in FY26, with net membership increasing by 13.7% – AWA's highest growth to date. Retention also returned to expected levels following a decline in FY25.

Corporate membership recorded a particularly strong year, as AWA welcomed 116 new corporate members, delivering a net increase of 68, alongside improved retention and record numbers of organisations upgrading into higher membership tiers. Membership revenue reached \$2.1 million, exceeding target and increasing 14% on the previous year, including CPI.

Growth was accompanied by increasingly positive feedback from members. The 2026 Member Survey recorded an overall satisfaction score of 84%, up from 78% in 2024 and 72% in 2022. AWA's Net Promoter Score also continued its upward trajectory, reaching +16.1.

Members also reported stronger perceptions of value and their experience with AWA. Value for money increased from 53% in 2024 to 63% in 2026, while the proportion describing AWA as easy to deal with increased to 78%, compared with 57% in 2022. Retention intent reached 83%.

The results provide encouraging evidence of a healthy and growing membership community, while also highlighting areas for continued improvement. Under Strategy 2030, AWA will build on this foundation by developing a better understanding of different member needs and strengthening the value and experiences offered across the member lifecycle.

Membership growth at a glance

+13.7%

**MEMBERSHIP REVENUE
GROWTH – HIGHEST TO
DATE**

116

**NEW CORPORATE
MEMBERS NET INCREASE
OF 68 – HIGHEST TO DATE**

84%

**OVERALL MEMBER
SATISFACTION UP FROM
78% IN 2024**

Investing from a position of strength

AWA finished FY26 in a strong financial position, providing the stability and capacity needed to begin translating strategic ambition into action.

AWA achieved a \$597,000 operating return on total revenue of \$13.7 million, while continuing to deliver its core services and investing \$1.6 million in strategic activities. The result was \$597,000 above the approved balanced budget, primarily reflecting lower-than-planned operating expenditure due to changes in project timelines.

The strength of AWA's core activities continued to underpin the result, as well. Ozwater'26 delivered a record \$4.3 million profit, while strong membership growth contributed \$2.1 million in revenue, exceeding target and increasing 14% on the previous year, including CPI. Together, these results demonstrate the value of AWA's established activities in supporting both its immediate performance and its capacity to invest in longer-term change.

The \$1.6 million investment marked the beginning of a significant new investment cycle under Strategy 2030, supporting early action while building the organisational foundations required for future delivery. Investment included the Business and Operating Model Review, the launch of Indigo by AWA, expansion of the National Mentoring Program, implementation of the Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan and work to strengthen AWA's national advocacy foundations.

This investment reflects the deliberate sequencing of Strategy 2030. While new initiatives began creating value for members and the wider sector during FY26, considerable work also occurred behind the scenes to strengthen AWA's systems, data, processes, culture and organisational capability. These foundations will support a more impact-led association and enable AWA to work with members and stakeholders in broader and more effective ways as the strategy progresses. AWA closed the year with \$8.8 million in reserves, up from \$8.2 million in FY25. This position provides financial resilience to manage future risks while preserving capacity to invest in the next stage of AWA's evolution.

Looking ahead, delivering Strategy 2030 will require continued investment in people, systems, processes, data and technology, supported by a stronger and more diversified revenue base. The objective is not simply organisational growth, but greater capacity to create member value, strengthen AWA's influence and enable meaningful impact across the water sector. FY26 leaves AWA well placed to continue that work, supported by a growing membership community, strong core activities and healthy reserves.

Financial snapshot

\$597K
**operating
surplus**

\$13.7M
total revenue

\$8.8M
**held in
reserves**

\$1.6M
**invested in
Strategy
2030**

\$4.3M
**Ozwater'26
profit**



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