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## Working with Authority

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**The responsibility for the provision of water infrastructure for cities and towns has remained firmly with local councils, but with advice (and subsidy) from the Government. The agency providing the assistance has variously been located in the water entity or the local government department.**

The Water Resources Commission has been responsible for the design, construction and operation of State-owned water infrastructure assets with a value (in 1995) of some \$2.8 billion<sup>1</sup>, mostly catering for the rural sector. This value is dwarfed by the assets owned by local authorities, estimated at \$16 billion.<sup>2</sup>

Queensland is divided up into 125 local authority areas,<sup>3</sup> vastly different in scale. At one end of the spectrum are the major urban Councils such as Brisbane, Gold Coast and Townsville. Some, however, have very small populations and rate bases and hence have a limited ability to manage the full range of water supply services. They have thus relied historically on the State Government for assistance.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the need to provide water and facilities for the growing local authorities throughout Queensland was a principal reason for the establishment of a Water department. While town water supplies did not form his core business, much time and energy was spent by Hydraulic Engineer John Henderson inspecting and commenting on plans and specifications for water infrastructure for local governments. These authorities lacked in-house expertise and resources and relied heavily on the expertise provided by the State. Henderson and his staff held the role of technical consultants. The State's role of providing this technical expertise continued

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under various guises throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since local authorities may provide headworks, treatment works and sewerage schemes only once in a generation or so, it is difficult for any council to develop and maintain in-house expertise. On the other hand, a State instrumentality that deals with many cities and shires is much better placed to establish a critical mass of experts. Engineers such as Walter Peak were able to put their extensive experience into practice over a wide area of the State, constructing a number of dams for local authorities.

The responsibility for assisting with the provision of town water services lay with the Commission and subsequently with the Sub-Department of Lands until 1941, when the Department of Local Government was formed. The responsibility for town water supply and sewerage then passed to the new Department along with Aubrey Sharp, who became its Chief Engineer. These activities therefore ceased to be part of the Commission story. The section played an important role for local



*Water treatment plant*

authorities. The Department used to act as an ‘honest broker’ for councils, helping them to select appropriate consultants and contractors, assisting their technical staff, providing operation and maintenance advice on water and sewage treatment issues and supervising construction works.<sup>4</sup> The Department also had the responsibility for the subsidy scheme and part of the role was the certification that proposed works were properly and appropriately designed.

In 1980, the government of the day decided that all ‘water’ functions would be more efficiently managed if they were in the one department. Accordingly, the local government function was transferred to the Commission and briefly back into our story. Jim Turnbull was Chief Engineer (Engineering and Technical Services) at the time. Ian Ferrier describes Jim as *intelligent, articulate, politically astute and a sound engineering practitioner*.<sup>5</sup> To Terry Loos and other junior engineers he was a figure of fear and authority as he strode the long corridors of the Treasury Building. Young engineers not actively at work were familiar with the phrase “Jim Turnbull – look out!” So there was some amusement when the Gold Coast City Council acknowledged Jim’s contribution to Advancetown (Hinze) Dam by creating the ‘Jim Turnbull Lookout’.<sup>6</sup> Jim strenuously opposed the move to the Commission and was supported in his opposition by the Local Government Association. Eighteen months later, the section returned to Local Government. So quickly was the decision reversed that the section had not even moved from

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the Treasury Building to join other Commission officers in Mineral House. Jim Turnbull retired soon afterwards.

Under these circumstances, it was basically 'business as usual', with little impact upon either the section or the Commission. Alan Dunstan and Leon Henry resumed their roles as Chief Water Supply and Chief Sewerage Engineer respectively. It so happened that these two men were of similar height and build and both wore black rimmed spectacles of the 'Dick Smith' type and both had neatly trimmed moustaches. Consequently, they were frequently mistaken for each other but did little to disabuse those who erred.<sup>7</sup>

Following their retirements, the water and sewerage sections were combined to concentrate on planning reports. Therefore, a need arose for a group to look at more general management issues and develop guidelines and a new group, Water Management, was formed with former Chief Electrical Engineer Don Gardiner its Manager. His new position was Chief Water Management Engineer.<sup>8</sup> In November 1987, Commissioner Tom Fenwick was instrumental in negotiating for the section to move back to the Water Resources Commission. Bill Webber was then Chief Engineer (Engineering and Technical Services) at the Department of Local Government, with Ron Willis his Deputy. Bill had *developed quite an acrimonious relationship with Ken Mead, the Director of Local Government*, and so was favourably disposed to the planned move.<sup>9</sup> Under the proposed new structure, Bill Webber would be appointed Assistant Commissioner, the scope of work opportunities within the section would increase and more Executive Engineer positions would be made available.



*Bill Webber*

A number of Local Government Department staff and the Local Government Engineers Associations of Queensland (LGEAQ) again expressed misgivings about the arrangement, in particular that the functions that would be lost or sidelined within the Commission belonged with Local Government. However, the amalgamation took place<sup>10</sup> and the section moved to Floor 10 of Mineral House. According to Rolf Rose, when Bill Webber packed his possessions for the move, the dozen XXXX beer bottles in his office refrigerator were so far past their use-by date, they had steam trains on the label.<sup>11</sup> By April 1988 the Engineering and Technical Services had moved and set up the traditional work groups. These comprised a Design Office headed up by Kevin Haley, an Evaluation and Program group (Greg McMahan), a Water Management group (Don Gardiner) and an Operation and Maintenance group (Norm Whyte). Bill Webber was appointed Deputy Commissioner.<sup>12</sup> Ron Willis was given a Special Duties portfolio within the Local Authority Services group. The Construction group (Ian Ferrier) was absorbed

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*Ron Willis*

into the Commission's Construction Branch under John Potts. At the time of the move, the Water Quality team separated and went to the Department of Environment and Heritage.

Some time prior to Ian Ferrier becoming Chief Construction Engineer, his immediate superior was Fred Dean, an experienced engineer well known around the local government traps. One day, the Waggamba Shire Clerk rang and asked to speak to Fred. Tom Sneek, the Works Supervisor who had answered the phone, informed the caller in his Dutch accent that Fred wasn't there but he could speak to Ian Ferrier. The Clerk, however, had no desire to speak to someone 'inferior', but wanted to go to the top!<sup>13</sup>

Within a short time of the move, John Cantor and Norm Whyte were given the task of reviewing the structure of the Local Authority section. According to Richard Priman, a member of the design team at the time, an extensive period of workshops ensued. Tom Fenwick and other departmental officers gave presentations. A workshop was held in Toowoomba and an outside consultant from Canberra was called in to assist.

Once the Cantor/Whyte report was adopted, personnel and organisational changes followed.<sup>14</sup> A planning and design group was formed, called Local Authority Planning. Greg McMahon exchanged jobs with Bill Eastgate (then in Planning), who became the unit head. Don Gardiner was given charge of Local Authority Operations.<sup>15</sup> This unit was responsible for water management and operations and maintenance activities. The entire section was called Local Authority Technical Services. Personnel changes included Richard Connor's move to Rural Advisory Services. Ross Walduck was transferred to Designs, Kevin Haley and Diana Thacker (Wood) went to Water Resources Branch and Richard Steindl (who joined the section in 1990–91 after one of the reviews) went to Construction. Chemist and Agricultural Scientist Anne Woolley joined the Local Authority Operations group from Cairns City Council, where she had run their water and sewerage laboratory, in August 1990. At that time, Manager Norm Whyte was in charge of the group, which included Pat McCourt, Kerry Jones, Brian Davis, Paul Sherman and Geoff Stallman.

Sonja Van den Ende and Ken Wright had developed special expertise in video recording and were regularly used for a wide range of tasks. In 1995 and later, they made extensive recordings of the community interaction in Rolleston.<sup>16</sup> They later transferred to the Department of Environment. Pat McCourt is a talented and knowledgeable engineer and his ability to tell a good Irish joke was much appreciated

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at morning tea.<sup>17</sup> Chemist Paul Sherman came from a local authority also. *A very dedicated and reliable person to have around*, he is respected as a *very good thinker* and a *valuable member of the team*.<sup>18</sup> The role of the group was to *provide advice in terms of technology, operational work and to provide technical guidelines for the operation of the systems*.<sup>19</sup>

Prior to 1991, *a lot of the work of the section was 'hands-on'* in the Regions.<sup>20</sup> Each year, every plant in Queensland was checked by a departmental officer acting in an advisory role. This role changed with the introduction of Regional offices with regional engineers and technical officers in each. At least within the Local Authority area, this changed the Head Office role to a supporting one for the Regional staff. The Head Office section's core duties became the preparation of guidelines and writing technical bulletins on topical issues for publication and distribution to local government.<sup>21</sup> This helped fulfil an educative and advisory role in accordance with the Local Authority unit's perceived standing as a peak body. The Regional officers were useful in providing assistance on the ground and local authorities appreciated having someone in town. Undoubtedly the success of regionalisation was dependent on the personalities of the people involved within local authorities and the Department. As has been discussed elsewhere, Tom Fenwick was a strong proponent of regionalisation because of its benefits in addressing issues at the coalface. Decentralisation, however, caused a dilution of the technical pool of skilled people. There is a cumulative benefit of having technical officers working together as they enhance each other's skills and in isolation there is a greater tendency to misinterpret Head Office instructions and give inconsistent advice throughout the Regions.<sup>22</sup>

There was some reluctance for Head Office staff to transfer to Regions. Brisbane became very popular and Rob Drury was one who moved there. Chris Egbar transferred to Toowoomba, a move he has in no way regretted. When the section joined the Commission in 1988, it had 114 staff, only one of whom was outside Brisbane. By 1992, there were 24 Regional staff and only 59 in Head Office.<sup>23</sup> Head Office staff became advisers. One of Anne Woolley's initial principal tasks, which was indicative of the section's new type of work, was to write guidelines for the management of trade waste. This was *one of the best outcomes the section has had*, according to Anne, as it was well picked up by local governments and is still the basis of their trade waste practices.<sup>24</sup> The inspiration and foresight for the project came from Norm Whyte, who perceived a need for the work, rather than it being undertaken at the request of local governments. While still with the Department of Local Government, Don Gardiner had been involved with the drafting of new legislation for urban water sewage. The Department was concerned with changing procedures to reflect the increasing State population, particularly along the coast. Although it

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reached draft stage, it was never tabled in Parliament. In 1991, as part of the Operations Procedure and Environmental Services group within the Commission, Don was involved with Geoff Stallman, Ian Brown and Terry Loos in readdressing the issue. Again the work was circulated around departments for comment, then sent to Ministers and finally it became a Cabinet Submission. But again it did not progress. In Don Gardiner's opinion there was little drive within the Department for it. Bill Webber was pushing it but possibly no-one else.<sup>25</sup>

Following the retirements of Bill Webber and Ron Willis, Local Authority Technical Services was again restructured in 1992. Operations and Planning were brought together and Technology was left on its own as a major activity. This left the section with three business units – Local Authority Projects, Local Authority Operations and Planning and Local Authority Technology Services. All were headed by Bill Eastgate. Traditionally, the Department of Local Government had provided a design and construction supervision service, particularly to the smaller councils. The decision was made under the new arrangements that this should be greatly reduced in scale. The subsidy arrangements, however, still required technical 'sign-off' by the Commission and there was a continuing role in the provision of advice and information and promoting good practice through the promulgation of standards. The 1992 Evaluation of the Water Production Program of DPI (for which Terry Loos and Don Gardiner served on the review team) found that *the advice and information activities ... have achieved a wide acceptance by local authorities and consultants. The recent client survey showed that 80% of local authorities consider that the Commission keeps them adequately informed on new technology, products and services. Small to medium authorities have a greater need for this service.*<sup>26</sup>

The services to local authorities lacked an explicit head of power from any legislation.<sup>27</sup> The Loan Subsidy Scheme arrangements had been used as a means of maintaining the State's overview role on urban water services and ensuring that appropriate standards were met.<sup>28</sup>

Not everyone was happy with the decision to greatly reduce the design and construction service and officers such as Ian Ferrier argued strenuously with Tom Fenwick, particularly on behalf of the small councils.<sup>29</sup> The move by government out of service areas has, however, been inexorable. In the Commission, it commenced with the move from day-labour to contract construction and continued with the changes to the farm advisory service. In 2000, the planning and implementation of water infrastructure ceased to be core business of the Department.

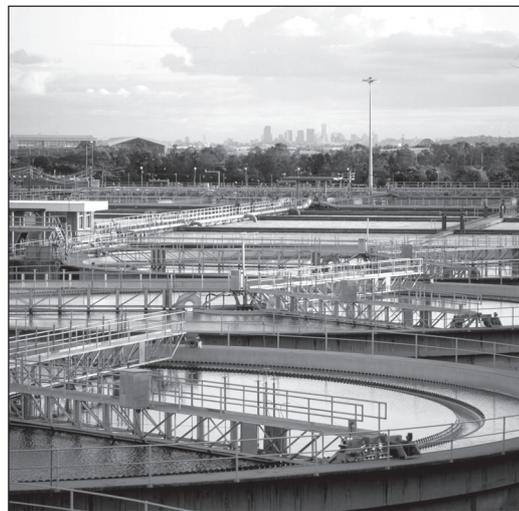
Instead of providing engineering consultancy services, the Department moved towards promoting Total Management Planning and promoting best practice through

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the provision of guidelines on subjects such as water supply, sewerage planning, drainage, sludge disposal and water supply monitoring.<sup>30</sup>

In 1993–94, further changes saw the three business units become one – the Client Advisory Services Division. The Local Authority Technical Services within this unit was renamed Policy and Practices. Rural Advisory Services, which had declined considerably from previous years, came under the umbrella of this business unit also. *Its bore activities and some of the sideline activities continued.*<sup>31</sup> Although Construction was moved to John Potts’s area, the design group did not join the main design group, but the drafting groups were amalgamated.

When Kerry Jones was transferred to Strategic Policy under Peter Noonan, this, according to Richard Priman, really led to the demise of Local Authority Projects as the personnel were split between Local Authority Operations and Planning and Local Authority Policy and Practices. One of the last projects of this group was a water treatment augmentation scheme at Gladstone, which was led to near finalisation by Howard Gibson. This change complied with the preferred direction of Kerry Jones and senior management in the Department, which favoured a facilitating, guiding role rather than ‘hands-on’.<sup>32</sup> A new business plan was prepared for the unit which confirmed this role.

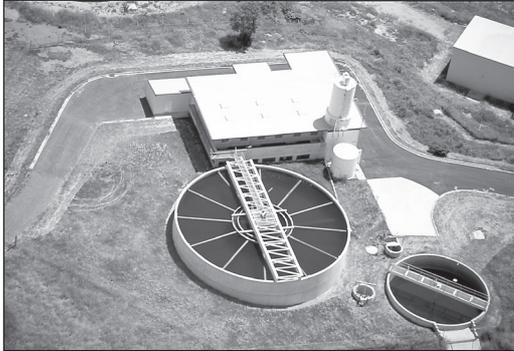


*Brisbane's sewage treatment works*

Bill Eastgate was transferred to Information Technology and Peter Noonan was appointed General Manager of Client Advisory Services. In 1995, Peter was promoted to Executive Director Resource Management and the local authority activities were incorporated in the Regional and Rural Development group with Lee Rogers as the responsible General Manager.

For a time, the Policy and Practices group became an evaluation unit and initiated a number of pilot projects used to evaluate various processes. Some of these projects were funded under National Landcare funds available at the time. A major project, which was started in the early 1990s by Howard Gibson and John Simpson and has recently been completed, was the construction of wetlands for treating wastewater at a number of locations. The Department developed pilot projects with local governments and collected extensive data and guidelines for design and operation.<sup>33</sup>

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*A sewage treatment plant*

Paul Sherman re-examined filtration plants, in particular sand filtration which is an old, but simple, technique which still has some application. The Department also developed a portable direct filtration plant which they made available to local governments so they could test its suitability prior to building a major facility. This was quite productive in terms of making that knowledge available to local authorities.<sup>34</sup>

1994 saw another internal review of the local government functions as part of the establishment of the Rural and Resource Development group. A thorough report was prepared by external consultant Bill Roberts, from Gibson and Associates. The result of the report was to confirm the direction Client Advisory Services had been heading. Ian Ferrier and Richard Priman report that some staff found the constant reports and restructuring *very traumatic*.<sup>35</sup> Many staff left the organisation. Whereas at one time the drawing office of the Local Authority group would have had 21 to 25 people in its office alone, offering support to a design office of between 12 and 15 people, these numbers in the 1990s were reduced to about 50 local government people all told. Design was the major area of reduction with significant players such as Ian Hooper, Noel Lavery, Dave Tunnah and Frank Shields all leaving to join the private sector. Some of these people, particularly Ian Hooper, have done extremely well; others have been less fortunate. Aneurin Hughes joined consulting engineers Cardno and Davies and is now an Associate Director.<sup>36</sup> There was also a significant transfer of personnel from the evaluation and program area which had previously reviewed planning reports and assisted the financial administration programs. Terry Loos



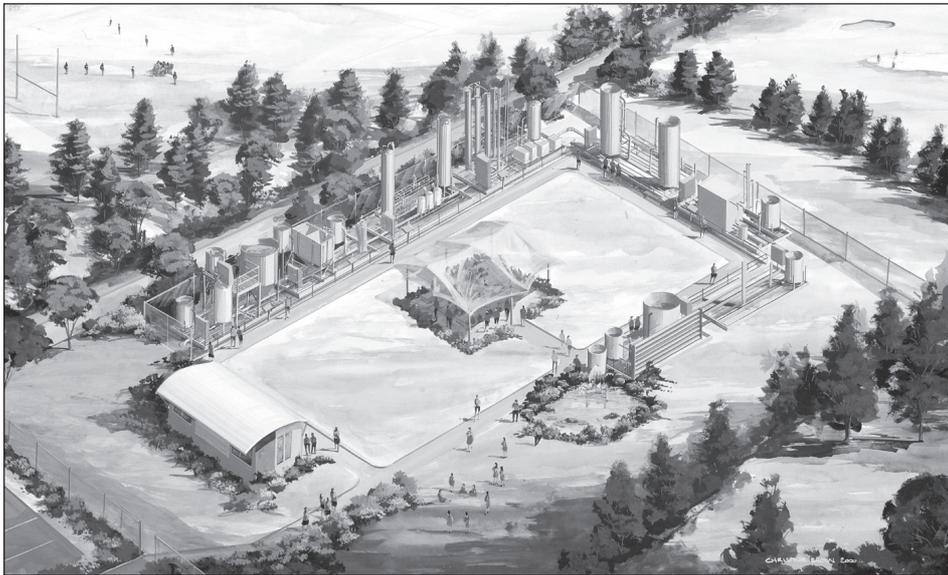
*Wastewater recycling*

(who the *Courier-Mail* thought was well named for an officer of the sewerage section) joined the Resource Management group and later moved to the Department of Environment. Pat McCourt left to work for Pine Rivers Shire but he has since returned. Daryl Ross is now in charge of Ipswich Water. Rolf Rees returned to the consulting world, from where he had been recruited. Natural attrition, as people retire and are not replaced, has caused a continual reduction in the numbers

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of people involved with the local authority area. In particular, with the change in focus, the services required by inspectors were greatly reduced and officers of this ilk became largely redundant. Redeployment has been one way of redressing the problem.

Many stalwarts have remained, including Richard Priman, Alan Lievesley, Jan Zaricky, Rolf Rose, Russell Cuerel, Ken Aitken, Dick Croft, Darryl Muller and Peter Artemieff (although he spent a time in the rural advisory area). Until he took a Voluntary Early Retirement, Gordon Wilson had cheerfully and efficiently reported for duty as the ‘godfather’ of the administrative staff for many years. He now is



*Artist's impression of the Advanced Water Treatment Demonstration Plant at Brendale*

seen frequently about town minding his investment portfolio<sup>37</sup> and working devotedly for the Old Boys. Bob Deskins (who claimed to have fought in two wars – Beerwah and Toogoolawah) later joined RRD and then stayed with DPI. Janeen Schouten was Secretary to the Plumbers and Drainers Board administered by the Commission. Tony Ahearn and Ian Tully continue to soldier on while John Clowes had to retire early through ill health. Vaughan Dollar found that there was no longer need for his technical skills.

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Kerry Jones, as Manager of Local Authority Projects, established Waterwise under its banner. This move reflected the shift from design to policy awareness type projects. Since the 1994 restructuring, the Policy and Practices group has had a substantial input into the development of national guidelines on Australian drinking water as part of the National Water Quality Management Strategy. Under Kerry's guidance, the work done by Queensland was responsible for a couple of chapters in those guidelines. This followed on from previous work led by Paul Sherman. The group also represented the Department on national bodies dealing with water quality and trade waste. Peter Beavers, a recognised expert in wastewater, had been effective in the preparation of effluent re-use guidelines.<sup>38</sup> *Howard Gibson has been the driving force behind the wastewater recycling strategy. Noted for his foresight and ability to look outside the Department for things that need to be addressed, he often has many things on the go at once.*<sup>39</sup>

Working with local authorities has not always been easy. Often the State is viewed with suspicion as to what the 'real' agenda is. The Local Government Association simply doesn't think we need a state government at all. This is a *fundamental tension*.<sup>40</sup> With reducing expertise, it is harder for the section to retain the ability to assist local government even if the political will was there. It is doubtful that there would be many people left in the Department with the technical skills or practical experience. In the past, Engineering Services in the Department of Local Government was a training ground for local authority engineers throughout



*Ian Ferrier*

Queensland. It provided planning or design, electrical and mechanical or construction services to local authorities or DOGIT councils and imparting valuable skills to junior engineers, draftsman and other technical officers.<sup>41</sup> The 32 DOGIT communities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with a Deed of Grant in Trust) have benefited considerably from the formation of an Asset Management Unit in Cairns in 1994.<sup>42</sup> Those employees who worked on water supply schemes for DOGIT communities experienced a wide range of situations, from tropical paradises with magnificent views and fishing to squalid settlements.<sup>43</sup>

In April 1991, Ian Ferrier commenced working on a strategy to obtain funding for a unit to address the operation and maintenance needs of water supply and sewerage infrastructure on the DOGIT communities. Cabinet approved funding of this Asset Management Unit (AMU) in July 1993 and it was subsequently established in Cairns and comprised a local

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government engineer (Bob Scheltens) and three Works Supervisors, Duncan Wallis, Wayne Fallen and Brian Searle (who was stationed on Thursday Island).

Bob Scheltens also acted as Shire Engineer to Aurukun, Mornington Island, Burke and Torres Shire Councils. There was a major water supply upgrade for the seven most needy Torres Strait DOGIT communities under the management of Edmiston & Taylor Consulting Engineers at this time. Bob had a very heavy workload. Unfortunately he died suddenly on Thursday Island of an aortic aneurism in November 1994. His fate mirrored the demise of Ken Brown in 1979. Ken had served for many years as Chief Construction Engineer of the Local Government Department and Administrator of Torres Shire. At the time of his death, aged 53, he was concluding the arrangements preceding the first elections of the newly formed Mornington and Aurukun Shire Councils. Ken was a lovely bloke – a tremendous boss and staunch supporter of his troops and was earmarked for higher office in DLG.<sup>44</sup>

Following the untimely demise of Bob Scheltens, his position was filled by his assistant engineer, Dano Myrteza, until Russell Cassidy assumed management of the group (now known as the Community Water Services Group) in 1997. The group has expanded to include Barry Hunt (ex-Cairns City), who provides local government services to remote northern shires and Wayne and Duncan still provide advice to the mainland DOGIT communities. Brian Searle has retired and has been replaced by a group of six technical officers headed up by Trevor Rowley and one administration officer (all based on Thursday Island), who manage the greatly expanded infrastructure on the outer island communities in Torres Strait with the Cairns-based assistance of Stuart Duncan. This group has been managed in recent years by their Regional Manager, Peter Gilbey, who has been based in Townsville.<sup>45</sup>

Anne Woolley is of the view that the Department needs to keep in touch with local authorities and industry. Industry has also changed to multi-national companies whose technology is patented and subject to intellectual copyright, making it hard for the section to evaluate its effectiveness. Clearly, this impacts on effectiveness.<sup>46</sup> Working with the Department of Local Government externally rather than from within has not been easy either. The Local Government Department still controlled the purse strings and approved council or shire facilities. They still have the legislative role. The Commission (and successor



*Richard Priman*

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departments) was reduced to an advisory role, both to help local authorities fill the criteria for funding and to advise other government departments. According to Richard Priman, *the cultural change from a hands-on culture to a steering culture is a difficult thing to get used to. It will become increasingly difficult to steer without staff trained in “doing”. It is a real challenge for this organisation.*<sup>47</sup>