



WATER SERVICES
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



**WSAA submission to Jobs
and Skills Australia:
2025 Core Skills
Occupations List
Consultation**

24 September 2025

**CAREERS
IN WATER**

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Introduction

The Australian water sector welcomes the consultation process on the Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL). The Water Services Association of Australia and our members recommend Job and Skills Australia:

1. Include critical water sector roles on the CSOL list, and
2. Improve the visibility and promotion of the water sector.

The Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) is the peak body representing Australian and New Zealand water utilities. Our members provide water and wastewater services to over 24 million customers in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand including many of Australia's largest industrial and commercial enterprises. Investment in the water sector is increasing significantly to meet the challenges of population and housing growth, ageing assets and climate change. WSAA's forward looking data on capital expenditure shows a doubling of national investment by 2027 to over \$10 billion annually.

Australian water utilities directly employ over 30,000 people. For every job created in our sector, another 4 jobs are created in the wider economy. Every dollar invested in water and wastewater services delivers an increase of \$2.40 in the economy. Skill shortages and workforce development are therefore critical issues facing the water sector for the continued provision of safe, reliable and water and wastewater services.

In a recent survey of WSAA member organisations, just over half had relatively low confidence levels that in 6-10 years they could deliver business objectives with current skills and capabilities. The Australian water sector also faces an ageing workforce with approximately 20% of urban water utilities' staff aged 55 or over. The registered training market is also fragmented and dysfunctional which impacts the sector's skills development capability.

The water sector also faces a critical shortage of specific skills which are even more pronounced in regional and remote areas. This shortage increases the risk of water safety incidents that could compromise public and environmental health.

In summary, the water sector must materially improve participation rates (including skilled migrant labour) and drive productivity improvements.

Critical skills for the water sector

The current Occupation Shortage List (OSL) and CSOL lists do not reflect the water sector's critical roles or the shortages we currently face or forecast.

Water utility critical roles

While the OSL and CSOL 'Waste Water' and 'Water Plant Operators' and various Engineering roles (not water specific) are reflected, consultation with WSAA Members identified within a recent WSAA survey highlighted the following specific roles as critical with respect to:

- business continuity, and
- current and forecast shortages.

WSAA calls for these critical roles be reflected in OSL and CSOL Lists. Recognising the high number of critical roles, if required, WSAA would be willing to work with Jobs and Skills Australia to prioritise.

- Water Engineers to be reflected in greater granularity such as Network, Planning, Electrical, Mechanical, Civil, Dam Safety, Process, Operational Technology (Control Systems)
- Project Managers (Various – examples include Water Resources, Process, Commercial Operations, Customer, Treatment Planning, Environment Management, Risk, Safety, Capital Delivery, Corporate Performance, Emergency Management, CFO, Executive roles, Energy, Numerous Team Leader roles)
- Water and Wastewater Operators (including Water Quality Technology and Innovation Roles)
- Procurement Specialists/Contract Managers (Commercial Contracts, Procurement Manager, Legal/Construction)
- Water Planning Specialists/Modellers (Risk and Quality Management, OH&S compliance, Stakeholder Management, Continuous Improvement, Asset Planning, Asset Design, Water Quality, Water Network Operations, Water Treatment/Technology Manager, Environmental Management, Water Conservation)
- Information Technology/ Data Analysts (Asset Delivery, Infrastructure Architect, Enterprise Applications roles, Asset Information and Analytics, Data Scientist (various levels), Business Analysts, Information management, Data Quality Assurance, Cyber security (various), Infrastructure and Scada)
- Finance (Cost Controller, Cost Estimator, CFO, Regulatory Pricing Lead/ Specialist)
- Energy (Renewable energy roles, knowledge, advice and expertise, investigation, planning and financial analysis expertise for development and delivery of renewable energy systems, technical advice on systems and standards)
- Health and Safety, Human Resources and Risk Management roles

In addition, in the next five years water utilities see a greater focus is being placed on project management, contract management and upskilling of our engineering workforce. There will be continuing demand for information technology skills, including data, cyber and network infrastructure. Water and Wastewater Operators should remain a key focus.

Key capabilities that will be required within roles will include; resilience, data analytics, leadership, customer focus, technical skills, entrepreneurship, and collaboration.

Improving visibility and promotion

There is a lack of national understanding of skills shortage and capability gaps. Our workforce is significantly undercounted and this is reinforced by the absence of water sector critical roles within the National Skills Priority List and in the ANZSCO codes.

This has significant implications for improving workforce planning, national risk management, how jurisdictions fund, coordinate and plan training delivery and attraction and retention. It also impacts the water sector's relationship with universities and TAFEs as defining water-based roles and skills has no ANZSCO foundation. More importantly, ambiguity in ANZSCO codes for water-based roles makes it very difficult to attract the 'right' talent under Skilled Migration Programs.

WSAA is engaged in the BuildSkills Australia 10-year Water Sector Workforce Plan project and support the intention of the project to play a vital role in assisting the sector improve transparency about water sector critical roles.

Encouraging participation is also important to fill the water sectors skills deficit. Federal assistance with skilled migration of the identified water sector critical roles would help improve the attractiveness of our labour market.

In addition, WSAA in collaboration the Australian Water Association and other stakeholders, have developed a sector campaign to promote attraction and retention of key talent (refer to www.careersinwater.com.au). There is a need to shift perceptions of the water sector, emphasise points of difference and improve visibility. The site is a hub for water career information, including a water sector wide Employee Value Proposition (EVP) that targets and celebrates diverse critical talent segments, along with branding and collateral.

Creating an inclusive work environment and fostering a diverse workforce are essential to meeting the water sector's challenges and growing participation level. As the 2025 WSAA Report [Belonging: Diversity Equity and Inclusion in the Water Sector](#) highlights, actively broadening talent pools is crucial to addressing existing and future skills gaps and the ongoing challenge of a predominantly male and ageing workforce.

Summary

The Water Sector values the opportunity to provide input. WSAA emphasises the critical need for addressing skill shortages and workforce development within the water sector.

The sector's significant contribution to the economy and the essential services it provides underscore the importance of including critical water sector roles in the CSOL. Enhanced workforce planning, improved visibility and promotion of the water sector, and federal assistance with skilled migration are vital steps to ensure the continued provision of safe and reliable water and wastewater services.

By fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce, and through collaboration with stakeholders, WSAA aims to meet the challenges of an ageing workforce, climate change, and housing growth.

WSAA looks forward to further discussions and collaboration to achieve these goals.

We confirm that this submission can be published in the public domain.

Contact

WSAA welcomes the opportunity to discuss this submission further.

