



International  
Water Association

## 60 second interview | *Michael Storey*

**Dr. Michael Storey**

Chair, IWA Young Water Professionals Programme  
Project Manager, Sydney Water Corporation. Sydney 2000 Australia.

**Dr Michael Storey** was appointed Chair of the IWA Young Water Professionals (YWP) Committee in January 2007. As Chair of this committee, Michael's role is to oversee the development and implementation of the YWP Programme. Michael is also a member of the IWA Strategic Council and as Chair of the YWP has a role on the IWA Board of Directors. This is the first time that YWPs have been represented on the IWA Board and demonstrates a clear commitment of IWA to its next generation of leaders.

Michael has been a member of IWA since 1999, and is a member of IWA Specialist Groups on Health-Related Water Microbiology, Water Reuse, Biofilms and Water Safety. Michael is currently employed as a Project Manager at Sydney Water Corporation, where he manages a portfolio of public health related projects, with an ongoing interest in water recycling. Since completing his PhD at the University of New South Wales in 2002 Michael worked as a post-doctoral researcher at the Swedish Institute for Infectious Disease Control in Stockholm, as well as the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in Sydney. Michael includes amongst his research interests, biofilms and microbial ecology, public health microbiology and microbial risk assessment.

- *What do you consider to be the most significant recent change in your field of expertise to have occurred in the last 10 years?*

In my opinion, the most significant change has been the development of the Framework for the Management of Drinking Water Quality. This approach has revolutionised the way that operators manage water safety and has shifted the paradigm from numerically-driven compliance to whole of system (catchment to tap) performance. The Framework promotes the increased awareness of a comprehensive, preventative multi-barrier strategy for drinking water quality management within a risk framework. The Framework is documented in the Bonn Charter and adopted by the WHO Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality. Originally developed for drinking water systems, the Framework now fundamentally underpins local (Australian) guidelines for drinking, recreational and recycled waters.

- *What do you consider to be the most significant future challenge that the water industry must deal with in the next 10 years?*

To fulfil the present and future needs of the water and wastewater industry requires the continuous development of a workforce that is both adequate in size, capable in skills and strong in leadership. On current trends, approximately half of the water industry workforce in the developed world will retire within the next 5-10 years. During the 60's and 70's, rapid expansion and growth of many public utilities and the water sector saw the seeding of today's industry leaders. In ensuing decades, rationalisation of utility sector workforce, an inability to attract and retain talent and lower percentages of students enrolling in science and technology disciplines has created an industry poorly equipped to meet future demands of leadership and operational competency.

The aim of the Young Water Professionals Programme is to nurture the next generation of young water professionals and assist the global water industry in the recruitment and retention of talented individuals. Moreover, the YWP Programme provides a global network for career development opportunities for YWPs as well as a forum to meet and communicate with peers and the wider water community.

In developing nations, increasing urbanisation and provision of adequate sanitation and safe drinking water remains a critical humanitarian challenge. Both as professionals working in the water industry and IWA members we share an obligation to assist in this regard. As an initiative of the YWP Programme, we aim to develop a work area that increase the dialogue between young water professionals working in developing and industrialised nations, so as to create not only a forum for exchange of ideas but also skills through an exchange programme.

- *Whom do you consider to be the leading expert in your field, outside of your own organization, and why?*

It is very difficult to choose one individual, there being so many. When I think of persons who have changed the way that we look at biofilms and microbial ecology, names such as Kevin Marshall and Staffan Kjelleberg immediately come to mind. I was fortunate that both worked in the School of Microbiology at the University of New South Wales during my undergraduate studies, and both sparked my interest in these disciplines.

When I think of advances in my other research interests, public health microbiology and microbial risk assessment, it is hard to go past names such as Chuck Gerba and Joan Rose, who have revolutionised these fields. It would be remiss of me not to mention my PhD supervisor, Professor Nicholas Ashbolt, who first ignited my passion in these disciplines and has been a tremendous reservoir of knowledge and valuable mentor in my career to date.

- *Which report, product or service from your organization deserves more attention and why?*

If I can consider the IWA YWP Programme for a moment, I would like to increase the profile of, and gain greater participation in our online discussion forums. During the YWP programme at the IWA Beijing congress held last September, the YWPs were fortunate to participate in an interactive forum with the Council for Distinguished Water Professionals (CDWP), focussing on career options, and their visions for the global water sector.

During that forum and subsequent online discussions, Council members shared with the young professionals lessons learned in their professional life, turning points in their career, as well as the important role that YWPs play in the future of the IWA. In addition, regarding their role in providing strategic direction to IWA, the CDWP have made a commitment to the next generation of water professionals, and have stressed the importance of intergenerational dialogue to meet the future challenges of the water sector.

- *In what ways would you like to see IWA change in the next 5 years?*

I would like to see the percentage of Young Water Professionals within the IWA double during the next five years. Actually this is a goal that I have addressed to the YWP Committee and myself during my two-year term as Chair. The IWA has been very proactive in recent years in promoting the importance of the YWP Programme, though we need to address initiatives that not only recruit new young members but retain them. At present the retention rate of student members is around 68%. I would like to see this figure increase to 100%. Although this is probably a little ambitious, a figure of around 80% would be preferable. The retention of full individual members is currently around the 85% mark.

- *Special interests...*

I have a number of special interests; the most obvious of these being my strong commitment to the Young Water Professionals Programme. On the research side, I have developed an increasing interest in sensor technology and its application to biosecurity and the rapid detection of microbial pathogens and other emerging contaminants.

- *What are the key fracture points – issues of conflict or debate in your specialist area?*

Within my specialist areas of water reuse and risk assessment, the issue of (indirect) potable reuse remains a point of division in my country and abroad. If I focus on local issues for a moment, climate change and variable rainfall combined with a currently unsustainable use of water has put in place water restrictions in many parts of Australia. Addressing the sustainable use of water is one of the greatest research

challenges currently facing our nation, and issues such as desalination and water recycling have created emotional debate and unprecedented interest in the media and at all levels of government.

- *Forthcoming news of interest...*

Over the last few years we have seen the YWP Programme build from strength to strength, culminating in a number of successful national and international conferences as well as workshops at IWA World Water Congresses in Marrakech and Beijing. In January this year, and with thanks to the tireless efforts of Adrian Puigarnau, the team at IWAHQ and the YWP Committee, we re-launched the IWA Programme, with four key working areas; connecting people, career development, sector support and programme development.

The first major milestones of the YWP Programme in 2007 will see the launch of a pilot mentoring programme, publication of the bi-annual YWP Newsletter as well as the production of a support package for national YWP conferences. In 2007 we are keen to introduce new initiatives to the YWP Programme including a work area for YWPs in developing countries that will facilitate greater dialogue and the possibility of an exchange programme. Over the next twelve months we also aim to raise the profile of the YWP and Programme Development Awards and increase the recruitment and retention of YWP members to the organisation.

One of our key objectives is to significantly increase the number of national YWP conferences. In recent years we have had outstanding national events in United Kingdom, Germany and Australia. During the next two years the YWP Committee is keen to see this initiative expand into other member countries. Additionally, there are several exciting YWP events this year including ASPIRE in Perth and national YWP conferences in Germany and the United Kingdom. As you can see the next twelve months will be an exciting time for the YWP Programme!

- *Career defining moments...*

By far and away the greatest impact on my career was the opportunity to work overseas. After completing my PhD in early 2002, I was very fortunate to be offered a three-year post-doctoral position by Professor Thor-Axel Stenström at the Swedish Institute for Infectious Disease Control. During my time in Sweden I was able to forge many close personal and professional relationships and was given the opportunity to present my research at international conferences throughout Europe, North America and Africa.

To work in another country and to learn another culture has been an invaluable experience, and a defining moment in my life, at both a personal and professional level. I strongly urge any young water professional to leave their comfort zone (if only temporarily) and consider the challenge of working abroad!

- *Contact points*

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