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CORPORATE BROCHURE





A dynamic SERVICE

As the first government owned corporation in the Northern Territory and the only combined utilities company in Australia, Power and Water Corporation is a trendsetter in a challenging environment, as Jane Bordenave reports



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ower and Water Corporation is the sole provider of power, water and sewage services to Australia's Northern Territory. The organisation was originally two separate government departments, which were brought together in 1978 as the Power and Water Authority. In 2002, the decision was taken to turn the Authority into a government owned corporation (GOC) under the Northern Territory's Government Owned Corporations Act. Being a GOC requires that Power and Water provides a service that is at least as efficient as any comparable business, while still remaining a public entity. It is unique in being the only fully integrated multi-utility company in Australia.



Supporting the operation is general manager Mike Knowles, a Canadian engineer who has been working in Australia for a number of years. He took up his position two years ago in 2009, after having worked as a consultant to the business for the two years prior to that. He is responsible for organisational strategy in an organisation that faces a range of unique, largely geographical challenges. “As a company, we have roughly 80,000 customers. However they are spread over an area of 1.3 million square kilometres—an area five times the size of the United Kingdom,” he says. “Additionally, we have wide climatic variations across the territory. In the north, around the capital Darwin, we have a tropical climate with a wet season and a dry season. Then we have very arid, desert conditions in most of the rest of the territory, so our services have to deal with extreme variations in climate.”

Population distribution across the state presents another challenge. Most of the services provided by Power and Water Corporation are centred around five main towns—Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Yulara. However, there are also a number of remote settlements dotted throughout the rest of the territory. This diversity calls for diverse solutions, particularly where the provision of power is concerned. The majority of the territory’s demand for electricity is met by gas-fired power stations except in remote locations, where electricity



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is mostly diesel-generated. There are also a number of solar power stations located both in Alice Springs and in several remote communities.

The electrical power system operated by Power and Water Corporation offers unique challenges. “Our power system operates in a number of isolated infrastructure ‘islands’ that are independent of each other and the Australian National Electricity Market,” explains Knowles. “Our main power system connects Darwin and Katherine—the main population centres in the Top End that are about 300 kilometres apart. Other smaller systems exist in Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Yulara. This set-up does unfortunately add costs: for example, one system cannot necessarily rely on another system during a power outage. Consequently we have had to invest capital to put in place adequate, ‘just-in-case’ backup systems.”

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GHD has been delivering projects for our clients in the Northern Territory for more than 50 years. Over this time through our commitment to the NT and our client focus, Power and Water Corporation and GHD have successfully delivered on power generation, power transmission/distribution, and water and wastewater infrastructure projects.

With our local power electrical, power mechanical, HVAC mechanical, structural, civil, water, environmental and project management teams numbering 60 strong, GHD will continue to meet the needs of the utility and private energy and resources sector. GHD wishes Power and Water Corporation the best in delivering their capital works program.





Within the Northern Territory, there is a growing demand for power, water and sewage services, largely thanks to a growing population and a number of mines, as well as oil and gas projects. This has spurred Power and Water Corporation to put in place a five-year programme worth between AU\$1.5 billion and AU\$1.6 billion in total, or AU\$350 million to AU\$450 million per year. This programme includes both the maintenance of existing systems and the building of new infrastructure. “To put this into perspective,” says Knowles, “if we look back to the end of the last decade, we were spending in the order of AU\$100 million per year. So the amount of work we are doing every year has quadrupled.”

Delivery of this ambitious five-year programme of work is supported by the company’s continuous improvement strategies. “We have in place two primary improvement strategies. The first was put in place four years ago with the objective of upgrading some of the systems that help us manage our assets. Currently we have one system that we use for work management, and another that provides a geographical display of our asset locations. We are upgrading these systems to introduce an integrated solution that provides better information on our assets, their location and condition, and investments. As part of this upgrade, we have adopted new processes and practices and are making sure we have the right data in those systems,” Knowles continues.

“Secondly, given the increase in the capital investment programme over the last few years we have started to look at what changes we need to make from a programme and project management point of view to get better visibility of project progress and how we get

tighter controls on costs and schedule. As a result, in February 2011 we appointed a general manager to oversee these particular areas.”

Power and Water Corporation is also dedicated to the continuous professional improvement of its employees. It considers this area particularly important, especially as there is the need to fill a potential skills gap that will be created as the older generation retires. “In terms of new recruits, we take quite a broad-based approach,” says Knowles. “We obviously look to recruit people who already have skills and experience from the utilities or mining sectors; however competition is quite high for these employees.” Consequently, the company also takes on newly qualified and people without training. “We run a graduate training scheme, which features rotations through different areas of the business. We also run a four-year apprenticeship scheme, where we train people with the manual skills they will need to work for us.” In total, there are up to 80 people in these programmes.

Power and Water Corporation is a unique business, not just within Australia but to a great extent, across the world. It is a public company; but it responds with a rapidity and flexibility to rival any private counterpart. Its five-year plan allows it to cater for ongoing growth in population and industry, enabling it to more than fulfil its mission to reliably deliver utility services to its customers—surely the most important mission of all. <http://www.powerwater.com.au/> ■



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