

Membership - Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities

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Summary

The City of Sydney is seeking approval to continue its membership of the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities Limited (CRC WSC) for a further three year term, commencing 1 July 2018 and ending 30 June 2021. Council approval is required for memberships greater than \$10,000 per annum.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities brings together the inter-disciplinary research expertise and thought-leadership to undertake research that will revolutionise water management in Australia and overseas. In collaboration with over 80 research, industry and government partners, it delivers the socio-technical urban water management solutions, education and training programs, and industry engagement required to make towns and cities water sensitive.

The membership of the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities aligns with Sustainable Sydney 2030 Direction 2: To Become a Leading Environmental Performer, and its objective to reduce potable water consumption and stormwater gross pollutant loads to the catchment within the local government area. Membership provides access to the latest research into social and technical water urban management, education and training resources that are essential in achieving the City's vision of becoming a water sensitive city and meeting its targets as set out in Sustainable Sydney 2030 and the City's Environmental Action 2016-2021 Strategy and Action Plan.

The membership also aligns with Resilient Sydney - A Strategy for City Resilience 2018 Action 14: Support a more flexible and resilient water cycle and its objective to highlight the need diversify Sydney's water cycle management to secure a liveable growing and resilient Greater Sydney.

Access to the latest research and thought leadership is critical for the City not only to achieve its own water sensitive vision and targets but also to advocate for regulatory and pricing reform to enable better water management outcomes and improve the liveability and resilience of our city.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) the City of Sydney continue its membership of the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities Limited (CRC WSC);
- (B) Council endorse an allocation of \$13,500 (excluding GST) per year for three years to be paid to the CRC WSC, consisting of \$10,000 as an annual contribution for research activities, and \$3,500 per year to be distributed (by the CRCWSC on behalf of City of Sydney) to Splash (hosted by Sydney Water) for its coordination of the NSW Advisory Panel; and
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, enter into and administer an agreement with the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities Limited to continue membership of the CRC WSC until 30 June 2021.

Attachments

Nil.

Background

1. The City has supported research into water sensitive cities since 2009 when it committed to support the Cities as Water Supply Catchment research program (as part of a consortium of councils and state agencies) to a maximum value of \$65,000 over five years. This was in line with the City's vision to become a water sensitive city with goals to reduce potable water consumption through water efficiency and recycling and to reduce pollutants discharged to waterways via stormwater run-off. The research outcomes would influence the City's development and implementation of the Decentralised Water Master Plan.
2. The Cities as Water Supply Catchments was three years into its five-year research program before it was expanded to form the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities on 1 July 2012. The research programs and the consortium membership continued through the transition from Cities as Water Supply Catchments to the CRC WSC.
3. The City continued its consortium membership of the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities for a further three years between 2015 and 2018 at an annual cost of \$13,500 (excluding GST) consisting of \$10,000 (excluding GST) per year for the CRC WSC research program and \$3,500 (excluding GST) per year as an administration fee to the Splash, Lead Agency of the consortium.
4. Splash was created in 2016 as a program to build capacity in people and organisations around sustainability, liveability, productivity and climate resilience. Through its activities, including knowledge sharing, capacity building, and networking opportunities, Splash provides valuable services to organisations within the water, wastewater and stormwater industries in New South Wales. Splash is hosted by Sydney Water and its key partners include the Office of Environment and Heritage, Department of Planning, Metropolitan Water Directorate, the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities, Blacktown City Council and others.
5. Splash has taken over the coordination and administration role of the consortium. Splash now coordinates the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities' regional advisory panel and is the conduit between the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities and its NSW members for application of research outputs.
6. The City is advocating for regulatory and pricing reform in the NSW urban water sector to enable innovation and investment in water recycling and water sensitive urban design.
7. As part of this advocacy, the City hosted the Water Sensitive Sydney Summit in February 2018. The Summit was attended by industry leaders from state and local government, businesses, developers, researchers and industry associations. The discussion was around the immense challenges of water management in the context of a growing population, aging infrastructure and a warming climate, while maintaining affordability and equity for Sydney's diverse communities. It was evident that attendees were aligned on the vision for a water sensitive Greater Sydney and this alignment can be attributed in part to the research work of the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities.

8. In 2017, the City coordinated the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities to use Greater Sydney as a focus for its research project around envisioning and transition strategies for a water sensitive city. An output of these workshops included a vision statement and transition strategies for how Greater Sydney can work towards achieving this vision.

About the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities

9. The Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities (CRCWSC) was established in July 2012. It is an Australian research centre that brings together many disciplines, world-renowned subject matter experts, and industry thought leaders who want to revolutionise urban water management in Australia and overseas. Its purpose is to help change the way we design, build and manage our cities and towns by valuing the contribution water makes to economic development and growth, our quality of life, and the ecosystems of which cities are a part.
10. To achieve future cities and their regions which are sustainable, resilient, productive and liveable, the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities' mission is to research interdisciplinary responses to water problems; synthesise diverse research outputs into practical solutions; and influence policy, regulation, and practice to promote adoption.
11. The Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities work with more than 150 researchers and approximately 60 PhD candidates from seven national and international universities and research organisations to generate the knowledge and on-ground solutions required to transform cities into liveable, resilient, sustainable and productive places.
12. The Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities is part of the Commonwealth Government's Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) Program, which currently supports 33 CRCs to commercialise leading-edge research taking place primarily in Australian universities and research institutions, and to produce graduates with hands-on industry experience.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision

13. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. The City's continuation of its membership to the CRC WSC is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 2 provides a road map for the City to become - A Leading Environmental Performer - Keeping abreast of the latest research and industry developments was critical in developing the City's Environmental Action 2016-2021 Strategy and Action Plan, Chapter 5: Water Sensitive City and associated actions. It continues to be integral to ongoing implementation, planning and delivery.

Membership of the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities is considered valuable to the City as it provides access to the latest research into social and technical urban water management, education and training resources that are essential in achieving its vision of becoming a water sensitive city. It also allows the City to collaborate with researchers, provide practical insight into the challenges of implementation and to influence research discussion and future direction.

Organisational Impact

14. Membership involves a 0.1 FTE contribution to cover City staff participation in Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities' events and meetings. This is to ensure councils receive value from their investment through making a commitment to active involvement in the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities. An example of delivering this FTE component would be attending quarterly Regional Advisory Panel meetings.
15. Benefits of the City's membership include:
 - (a) involvement in the current Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities research projects, to input to and shape the research, and also to bring early results and outcomes back into the City;
 - (b) access to Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities resources from research projects (web login provided to access the library and other resources);
 - (c) being part of a community of practice with other utilities, councils and consultants who are collaborating to create water sensitive cities. The Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities runs Regional Advisory Panel meetings for this purpose - industry partners meet quarterly to discuss the research, plan capacity building activities etc.; and
 - (d) discounted capacity building, training and research adoption activities, including free registration for four council members to attend the CRC WSC Conferences and subsidised travel and accommodation (typically for one person per council).
16. Access to the latest research and thought leadership is critical for the City not only to achieve its own water sensitive vision and targets but also to advocate for regulatory and pricing reform to enable better water management outcomes and improve the liveability and resilience of our city.

Risks

17. The key risk with not continuing membership of the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities is the knowledge gap that will result. This will jeopardise the City's ability to successfully implement the water related actions within the Environmental Action 2016-2021 Strategy and Action Plan.

Social / Cultural / Community

18. The community will benefit from living in a water sensitive city which is greener and cooler despite projected increases in population and a changing climate.

Environmental

19. Membership of the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities will assist the City in achieving its vision of a water sensitive city which can: provide the water security essential for economic prosperity through efficient use of the diversity of water resources available; enhance and protect the health of watercourses and wetlands; mitigate flood risk and damage; and create public spaces that harvest, clean and recycle water. A water sensitive city's strategies and systems for water management contribute to biodiversity and reduction of urban heat island effects.

Budget Implications

20. Sufficient funds for membership of \$13,500 (excluding GST) per year are included in 2018/19 operating budget and future year forward estimates.
21. The membership is broken into two parts: \$10,000 per annum will be distributed to the CRC WSC as an annual contribution for research activities, and \$3,500 per annum will be distributed (by the CRC WSC on behalf of City of Sydney) to Splash (hosted by Sydney Water) for its coordination of the NSW Advisory Panel.

Relevant Legislation

22. Local Government Act 1993.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

23. Start Date: 1 July 2018
24. End Date: 30 June 2021

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