

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP...AND A DESAL PLANT

Less than four weeks ago, the State Government announced AquaSure as the successful bidder for the Victorian Desalination Project, and already our project team has preliminary works under way.

Our construction contractor, Thiess Degrémont, will soon commence geotechnical testing and survey work on the plant site in preparation for the commencement of construction in October.

This geotechnical testing is sometimes called 'ground-truthing' as its principal aim is to accurately establish the precise geology and sub-surface characteristics of the project site. This work supplements the extensive geotechnical investigations carried out previously by the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Other activities now under way are less visible, but just as important. Members of my project team last week conducted the first in a series of briefings to inform Bass Coast Shire Council, emergency services organisations and community groups about key aspects of the project, including plant design, and to obtain their feedback on a range of issues.

The briefings, held at the Council offices, were led by Thierry Bergero, AquaSure's chief operating officer. Thierry and the team gave presentations to councillors and council officers and met with representatives of community and emergency services organisations.

The responses we received in the presentations and meetings were largely positive and wholly constructive. It was heartening, of course, to meet and talk with

supporters of the desalination project, but the contributions from those who have opposed or have concerns about the project were just as valuable.

The high expectations of the community, particularly with regard to environmental matters, were made very clear to us and will help us ensure that we deliver a project of which the whole community can be very proud.

We have said AquaSure is seeking to establish a strong and positive relationship with the Bass Coast community and, if these meetings were any guide, we know this goal can and will be achieved. We will welcome invitations to talk to service clubs and other organisations.

Among the early issues we are actively addressing is the availability of local rental accommodation for AquaSure's workforce during the two-year construction period.

Obviously it is to the benefit of everyone if a large proportion of our workers are able to live locally during construction. This will reduce the safety risk associated with long-distance commuting, keep down traffic congestion on main roads and maximise their spend with local shops and services.

Equally, we want to avoid as far as possible creating a temporary housing shortage or cost increases for long-term residents. So, with Council's help, our strategy is to focus sharply on holiday accommodation that is normally vacant for much of the year. Council has conducted a housing survey, funded by the Victorian Government, and has already identified a sizeable pool of suitable properties.

Last week, AquaSure and Council hosted an initial discussion with local real estate agents about a Housing Accord prepared by Council, designed to ensure the implementation of this strategy. We will be meeting again soon and will continue to work closely together to ensure that this strategy is successful.

The community is asking us a variety of questions about the project and we encourage this to continue. One frequent question is 'Will you close Williamsons Beach during construction?' and a related query was "Will the seawater intake and outlet pipes cross the beach?"

The answer to both these questions is no. The intake and outlet tunnels will be 20 metres underground and built using an underground tunnelling machine, which means the beach will not have to be closed at any stage. It will remain open for everyone during construction and beyond.

An offshore jack-up barge (or drilling platform) will be used to drill shafts to connect the seawater tunnels to intake structures and outlet diffusers, approximately 800m and 1100m respectively from the shoreline. An exclusion zone will be in place around the barge during construction, simply to protect the safety of the crew and those out on the water.

If you have a question like this for AquaSure, email me at contactus@aquasure.com.au. We will respond to all enquiries privately but in addition, I hope to answer the most important in this column.

Regards

Chris Herbert
CEO, AquaSure

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