

# Foreword

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The Conference Organising Committee, with great pleasure, welcomed more than 300 delegates to the inaugural Southern African Young Water Professionals Conference. The conference was organised by the Young Water Professionals (YWPs) under the auspices of the Water Institute of Southern Africa (WISA) and the International Water Association (IWA).

The aim of the YWP programme is to fulfil the present and future needs of the water and wastewater industries, which require the continuous development of a workforce which is adequate in size, capable in skills and strong in leadership. Young water professionals (graduates working and studying in the water sector who are under the age of 35 years, or recently qualified) are the future of the water sector, and therefore the future of the IWA and WISA. The YWP programme provides a range of activities, services and initiatives to young professionals and students in the water and wastewater sectors. As well as engaging with YWPs, the YWP Programme connects with employers, academic institutions and other professional associations to ensure that the future needs of the sector are understood and addressed. The activities and initiatives of the Programme hope to demonstrate the value of IWA and/or WISA membership to Southern African YWPs and encourages more YWPs to join these organisations by providing unity, a network of colleagues to give camaraderie and a sense of community to those of us making careers for ourselves in the world of water.

The first year of the SA programme focused on creating effective communication networks, including chapters in various provinces, to inform South African young water professionals. These activities culminated in the Southern African YWP conference, at which young water professionals from across the region and representing various spheres within the sector enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to network with both peers and prospective employers.

The YWP conferences offer young water professionals a valuable opportunity to present their work on a range of subjects, from water resource management, treatment and reuse to health-related aspects and basic water supply and sanitation. The abstracts were all thoroughly reviewed, resulting in presentations of exceptional quality. Distinguished water professionals were also at hand to impart words of wisdom to the young crowd.

The conference highlighted a number of challenges for young water professionals – not necessarily specific to any particular technology or topic, but rather focused on less tangible aspects. Chief among these were the need for better, cleaner, faster communication, especially between scientists/engineers/social scientists and the need to create a spirit of collegiality and pride in the sector. Another oft-repeated request was for the sector to retain its older generations whose decades of experience are crucial and whose wisdom is draining out of the sector. Despite these challenges, the conference vibrated with a high level of positive energy right up to the last sessions of the last day.

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