

The National Committee on Water Engineering Hall of Fame honours individuals who have made outstanding and lasting contributions to the water engineering profession in Australia. These individuals have shaped the theory and practice of water engineering. The Hall of Fame not only seeks to acknowledge their contributions but also seeks to document their legacy to develop a sense of tradition and appreciation of the history of the profession.



John Argue was educated at Sydney High School and University of NSW where he graduated with Bachelor Engineering in Civil Engineering in 1955 and he was awarded a Master of Science degree from University of Iowa, USA, in 1973. After graduating from UNSW, he worked for NSW Public Works Dept on the planning/design including scale model studies, for flood mitigation works on the Lower Hunter River following the floods which devastated Maitland in February 1955. In 1959 he joined the staff of the Water Research Laboratory, University of NSW, at Manly Vale.

In 1961, John was appointed Mathematics Master at Sydney Grammar School teaching mathematics and mechanics, a post he held for four years before accepting a position as Lecturer in Hydraulics and Hydrology at the South Australian Institute of Technology in Adelaide. His career at SAIT included promotion to Senior Lecturer (1969), Principal Lecturer (1979), Associate Professor (1990) and Academic Leader of the Civil Engineering discipline in 1996. In 1991, SAIT became part of the University of South Australia. Following his retirement from the University in 1999, he was conferred with the title, Adjunct Professor of Water Engineering.

In 1986, John authored “Storm Drainage Design in Small Urban Catchments: a Handbook for Australian Practice” published by Australian Road Research Board. The Handbook received an Engineering Excellence award from South Australian Division of the Institution of Engineers, Australia in 1986. The handbook has sold over 2500 copies and is still reprinted by ARRB.

Professor Argue commenced his involvement in water-sensitive stormwater management when he supervised student projects in the late 1980s on “leaky” wells and gravel-filled trenches located in sandy-clay, medium clay and heavy clay soils of the Adelaide metropolitan area. The first venture into ‘real world’ installations using the principles discovered through this research came with the construction in 1991 of New Brompton Estate in the City of Charles Sturt. At this site there is no conventional stormwater infrastructure and roof runoff, stored in an aquifer 30m below ground level, can be recovered to replace mains water used in open space irrigation. The project is widely acknowledged as the first example of Water Sensitive Urban Design (other than constructed wetlands) in Australia.

The success of the scheme at New Brompton Estate led to the establishment in 1993 of the Urban Water Resources Centre (UWRC) within the University of South Australia, to develop and promote “new thinking” in stormwater management. Professor Argue was Director of the Centre until his retirement from that position in March 1999. The Centre has been outstandingly successful and in 1997-98 won three national and seven State awards for environmental or engineering excellence.

Professor Argue was commissioned by Newcastle City Council in 1995 to prepare a Concept Report for the “Figtree Place” project: it was brought to fruition in 1998. At the time of its construction (27 residences), this project was regarded as the leading example of stormwater-based water sensitive urban design applied to medium/high density residential living in Australia. Findings originating from the “Figtree Place” project, now widely published by University of Newcastle which took over the project, are influencing residential water cycle management throughout Australia, particularly as regards the use of rainwater tanks. In 2001 John was invited to contribute to the “Heritage Mews” medium density residential development project in Castle Hill (Western Sydney). He was able to introduce innovative design procedures and new technologies into the project (62 townhouses): it represents the next progressive step in stormwater-based water-sensitive design along from that at Newcastle. It has been fully operational since early 2005.

The major project which has dominated Professor Argue's time (as Editor) since his retirement is a document which gathered together all of the research and practical experience gained by the Urban Water Resources Centre throughout its 11-year history to 2004. This collation, titled "*Water Sensitive Urban Design: basic procedures for 'source control' of stormwater - a handbook for Australian practice*" (short title, "WSUD Handbook") was published by UniSA and launched in November, 2004. It represents the integration of stormwater flood control, pollution control and harvesting technologies presented with explanations, theory and design procedures made as simple as possible. The primary aim of the document is to provide this information to students, novice engineers and technical officers as well as experienced practitioners with a view to fostering the spread of water-sensitive practices across the nation.

In Summary

Prof John Argue has been a pioneer of sustainable ideas in water management in urban environments in Australia – working on innovative urban engineering ideas for the capture and reuse of urban water well before these ideas were in the headlines.

His passion for his work played a strong role in inspiring students to work and research in the field.

The pioneering work John started on WSUD source control back in the late 80s, led to the construction of several landmark demonstration projects in the greater Adelaide region in the 90s, numerous widely read publications and a continuing vision for the future of WSUD.