**Main Roads Western Australia: Internal culture of quality & standards**

******

***Main Roads Western Australia (Main Roads WA) is part of the WA Government’s Transport Portfolio. It is responsible for the delivery and management of a safe and efficient main road network in WA through:***

* ***Managing the state’s highway network,***
* ***Planning, building and maintaining the state's major government road infrastructure projects,***
* ***Enabling technology to manage the network, improve traffic flow and provide real-time travel information, and***
* ***Improving amenity by developing roadside stopping places, public art infrastructure and understanding all transport user needs.***

***Main Roads also provides guidelines and specifications for road and bridge design and construction, environmental management, surveying methods, and traffic engineering. NATA provides accreditation for Main Roads testing laboratories for calibration and infrastructure.***

As an asset manager, Main Roads deliver their infrastructure portfolio through a quality contract management system. To ensure all projects are delivered to the required quality standard, Main Roads requires that all testing be undertaken by NATA accredited laboratories, and undertakes audit testing through its internal material testing laboratories to provide confidence that the works meet specifications*.*

Main Roads has been accredited since 1985, when the Australian government required all publically funded road projects to be NATA accredited. Today, Main Roads has laboratory and testing capability in each region of the State with the capacity to also conduct equipment calibration. The calibration operation complements the testing side of the business by ensuring equipment used for testing also complies.

The primary objective for Main Roads seeking NATA accreditation is to maintain informed management of the whole design and construction process. Contractors commissioned under specified guidelines from Main Roads, are required to conduct their own testing in accordance with the contract specification that incorporates NATA accreditation status. However, due to past issues associated with contract project safety and quality, Main Roads has found it essential to maintain an assessment responsibility, ‘*we had some significant failures of the road network, so it was decided that we needed to understand what was going on…so we maintained some capability and that has meant that we’ve kept our laboratories and our NATA accreditation’.*

By maintaining NATA accreditation, Main Roads are able to provide an assurance that the accreditation tests carried out by the contractor when doing work for Main Roads, are maintained at the highest standard. In the case of a dispute arising, Main Roads are able to apply NATA accredited processes to resolve any system failure. Thus, NATA accreditation provides a level of credibility for the asset manager, which they wouldn’t otherwise have.

Main Roads’ infrastructure is often constructed in very remote parts of WA, where it is necessary to acquire raw materials from local sources to save time and costs. To be able to employ this technique, materials still need to be rigorously tested. Main Roads’ testing laboratories in regional locations enable internal staff to understand the quality of the materials used by contractors and how that material performs. Main Roads also maintain an internal capacity to understand test results, ‘*if we get results back from a commercial laboratory that don’t make sense or they look wrong, we can recognise that because we have the knowledge and skill…so NATA accreditation provides us with a bit more rigour around how people do things’.*

Main Roads often search for new materials and innovative processes to improve asset building efficiencies and safety. For example, Main Roads are working with the Australian Road Research Board and other state authorities to use a new asphalt product that has been successfully used in Europe ‘*it is not a new product, but it is innovative as it requires a new method of testing to be developed that can be accredited by NATA…so we can’t just follow the old empirical tests….we have to do a lot of research to find out if we can use it…’.*

For innovation and trade, Main Roads see the importance of accreditation, *‘I have many people who contact me about getting Main Roads to use a product that has been imported from overseas’.* If the imported product can be tested at the source of origin and demonstrates compliance with the equivalent of NATA’s accreditation standards, it could be imported, but this is often a stumbling block for importers.

At the end of the day, Main Roads utilise NATA accreditation to ensure a level playing field which involves the contractor and the asset manager using the same testing processes and being assessed by the same accreditation arrangement, ‘*a test result unless it is done right, means nothing’.*