

COUNTRY ENERGY **CASE STUDY**



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COUNTRY ENERGY: vital stats in brief

- Operates Australia's largest power supply network covering some 95% of NSW, 35,000 square kilometres in south west Queensland, and retails to five states.
- A top 150 Australian company with revenues of \$2 billion.
- Has some 4,000 employees in 142 customer and field service centres, nine regional offices and four business centres in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Newcastle.
- Also operates bottled gas, reticulated gas (24,200 customers) internet services, water management and water and sewerage services.
- Oversees 195,000 kms of powerlines, 1.4 million power poles and 113,000 distribution substations.
- More than 870,000 customers across NSW, VIC, QLD, SA, NT.

CERTIFICATIONS WITH NCS INTERNATIONAL:

ISO 14001 Environmental
Management System

AS/NZS 4801 Safety
Management System

Electrical Safety

Gas Auditing



BACKGROUND

Existing in one form or another from the 1950s, the company that is today Country Energy is the result of a series of amalgamations that culminated in 2001 with the uniting of the core electricity distribution and transmission business with gas, water and telecommunications (ISP, cables, wires and broadband) businesses.

Key challenges for Country Energy

Establishing effective, consistent risk management and compliance practices throughout diverse businesses spread across widespread, mostly remote, geographical areas.

The solution: working with NCS International

A top-down, whole-of-business approach working in close partnership with NCS International to establish tailored systems that reflect the working environment and meet multiple stakeholder and compliance needs.

Greg Paterson is Country Energy's Group Manager for Safety, Environment, Audit and Investigation. He works closely with Brian Davidson, Manager of Occupational Health and Safety, Environment Strategy and Compliance.

"When the businesses amalgamated they brought with them a hotch potch of certifications," explains Greg. "A decision was made to consolidate these standards into ISO 14001 and AS/NZS4801. We took a whole-of-business approach – with such a diversity of businesses and locations understandably this may have taken us longer than if we did it piecemeal, however the consistency and conformity of the outcome was very important to us. We see this as a critical risk management factor, especially when merging such diverse interests."





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Systems that support the corporate strategy

“A lot of people think of SMS and EMS as operational rather than corporate or strategic, however that view is changing,” says Brian. “These systems are increasingly regarded as central to an organisation’s ethos and values, as well as to the way they actually conduct their operations. This is very much in line with a greater focus on the ‘deed’ rather than the ‘word’ of governance, which is increasingly in the spotlight, in particular for major companies in recent years.”

Brian and Greg say that the whole-of-business approach they have adopted in certifying the businesses is a demonstration of their commitment.

“Measuring performance from safety and environmental points of view forms part of the way we live out the corporate vision. The business units can see that this is the direction in which we are going and relate it back to the strategy.”

They also acknowledge that at the bottom line, having these systems in place and independently verified by NCS International offers assurance to owners and key stakeholders that they are keeping in line with compliance requirements.

Vital for success: partnership with the certification body

Having experienced first-hand the massive logistical task of achieving certification of the multiple Country Energy business units, both Greg and Brian identify the relationship and involvement of the certification body as critical for success – and offering the potential to save time, money and trouble.

“The big lesson is to engage the certification body early so you can work in partnership from the ground up. If possible, get them to do the pre-assessment audit, it saves time and grief. Although our systems are well up to speed now we certainly could have done with strengthening the foundations and getting the expert input at an earlier stage.”

Greg says that such early involvement also enables the certification body to get a greater understanding of the system, its prime imperatives and the various stakeholder needs.

“For example, we were putting in both 4801 and 14001, as well as going through the process of gaining recognition as self insurers for worker’s compensation purposes,” he explains. “There are a lot of issues to get sorted and having the certifying body across all of them at the same time offers great benefits and streamlining for all concerned.

“Certainly the partnership we have built with NCS International now offers us those benefits. The scope and complexity of our business demands a flexible, first-hand knowledge approach. We are not a generic template business and need to work with an organisation that recognises that and understands our unique business needs.

“With NCS International I think we have that.”



Key messages from Country Energy



- Become involved with your certification body and auditor as early as possible, preferably at implementation stage, and work in a partnership.
- Take advantage of training services on offer to ensure solid, consistent foundations for the systems you implement, particularly where multiple stakeholders and standards are involved.
- Board-level endorsement and affirmation of the systems demonstrates commitment and helps the organisation meet its strategic goals.

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