



## Governance Background

**The Problem:** The West Coast Regional Water Supply Authority was structured as a cooperative. Inherent in the West Coast structure was an economic disparity that unfairly burdened some members, making it difficult to fund and develop new water supplies. Some member governments owned their own water supply facilities and contracted with the Authority for a share of water from a specific facility. Others owned none or few facilities, contracting with the Authority for shares of water from several facilities. Some were precluded from developing their own supplies.

The cost of water from the Authority varied from member to member, depending upon the facility from which a member contracted for water. Water from an older wellfield was significantly cheaper than water from a newer wellfield due to the difference in cost to develop the facility. The Authority was governed by a five-member Board of Directors, plus one non-voting member. However, a majority vote of the Board was not always binding. Any large member could “pocket veto” a project by withholding funding for joint supply development.

Demand for water outpaced the Authority’s water supply development. The agency developed only 8 million gallons per day (mgd) of additional supply from 1989 to 1998. While the Authority’s system failed to grow, the Tampa Bay region’s population continued to expand. From 1980 to 1990, population in the Hillsborough-Pasco-Pinellas tri-county region grew from approximately 869,000 to 1,967,000. By 1998, the area’s population exceeded 2 million.

**Funding Workshops Yield Regional Utility Concept:** In December 1995, the Board approved a Master Water Plan for the region which would bring an additional 85 million gallons of water per day, and greater conservation, to the region to meet the public’s and environment’s water needs. Under the Authority’s cooperative structure with the disparities among members, there was no fair and implementable way to fund the new water plan. Starting on March 11, 1996, a series of workshops were scheduled to develop funding strategies for the Master Water Plan. During a workshop exercise on April 8, 1996, the concept of reinventing the Authority as a regional utility with a unitary rate was born.

**Two-year Process and Legislative Support:** The idea of a regional water utility for Tampa Bay seemed innovative and progressive, yet its examination and the pursuit of funding for the Master Water Plan took many months. A “Group of 18” was established to continue exploring the regional utility concept through facilitated workshops. “Group of 18” was a policy panel comprised of the West Coast Regional Water Supply Authority’s Board of Directors, city or county administrator and the utility director for each of the six Authority member governments. Legal assistance from Nabors, Giblin & Nickerson, PA and Pennington, Moore, Wilkinson & Dunbar, PA. The Florida Legislature in 1996 supported the continued evaluation of the Authority’s governance restructuring and directed the agency and its members to evaluate its current operation and make recommendations for improvements.