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The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**RE: STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS**

Dear Madam,

I am writing in response to your call for submissions, with respect to *(a) current disincentives that exist for ecologically sustainable land and water use in New South Wales* from the terms of reference.

From my experience, I have found that local government policies provide some of the greatest disincentives for ecologically sustainable water use.

My submission is made at a time when my local council, Port Stephens Council, are enforcing connection to sewer in a number of suburbs, regardless of the age or type of existing wastewater treatment system utilised by each property owner. While the Local Government Act 1993 does not require landowners to connect to sewer, Port Stephens Council has a local policy which makes that requirement. Port Stephens Council has indicated that they will not allow residents to connect to alternative wastewater treatment systems and will not give consideration on the merit of individual cases.

Rainwater Tanks

Many local governments have planning laws that do not allow residents to install and use rainwater tanks, yet there have been a number of studies showing that even within urban areas, where it is not recommended they be used for potable uses, rainwater tanks successfully decrease water consumption.

Water consumption as a result of wastewater treatment systems

Conventional wastewater treatment systems rely on potable water at all stages, from water supply to effluent disposal. There are many examples of non-potable water use for purposes such as showering, toilet flushing, clothes washing and watering of non-food crops. For example, Fig Tree Place in Newcastle utilised rainwater tanks for such purposes and achieved a 54% decrease in internal water consumption¹.

A Federal Government funded study conducted by the Port Hacking Preservation Society Inc has shown that connection to conventional sewerage systems results in a 30% increase in water consumption². When households are required to connect to sewer, they must then rely on potable water supplies to maintain water regimes for established lawns and gardens that were previously watered by treated wastewater.

Conventional vs Alternative Sewerage Treatment Systems

There are many alternatives to conventional wastewater treatment systems, which are more environmentally and socially responsible than conventional systems. Conventional systems require massive expenditure on infrastructure that is aging from the day it is constructed, resulting in large ongoing maintenance and repair costs. These systems transport enormous quantities of wastewater, of which only 20-30% is 'black water' or raw sewage, over large

1 - Newcastle City Council (2000) A Case Study in Water Sensitive Urban Design"

2 - The Port Hacking Preservation Society Inc (1997) Avoiding Another Tragedy of the Commons: The Bundeena Maianbar Water Cycle Management Study

distances to treatment plants. The potential for a major sewage pollution incident is a concern with conventional wastewater treatment.

There are a number of alternative on-site wastewater treatment systems that have been approved by various State Health Departments and Environment Protection Authorities throughout Australia, including aerated wastewater treatment systems and worm farm waste treatment systems. These systems are purchased by the individual resident, with all maintenance costs the responsibility of the resident. Sewage is not transported long distances then disposed to water, but is used to water the land, lawn and appropriate gardens on the individual's property. When sited, installed and maintained correctly, these systems provide wastewater treated to a standard acceptable for watering lawns and non-food producing gardens without using potable water resources. This reduces the demand for potable water supplies for non-potable purposes. With local Councils insisting residents connect to conventional sewerage treatment systems, they are preventing residents from making sustainable water use choices.

Port Stephens Council's insistence that all households must connect to sewer, rather than consider individual lots on a case-by-case merit is a major disincentive for householders to manage their water in an ecologically sustainable manner. I am sure that Port Stephens Council is not the only Council placing these requirements on local residents.

My recommendations

1. it be recognised that conventional sewerage treatment systems are not always the most appropriate option for wastewater treatment
2. the NSW government place pressure on local government to cease the blanket requirement for connection to sewer and allow the many viable, ecologically sustainable alternative wastewater treatment systems to be installed where appropriate
3. further research on the safe use of alternative wastewater treatment systems, including impacts of soil type, land area required and vegetation uptake to enable more informed decision making by local government
4. establishment by NSW Health of a set of guidelines for safe, ecologically sustainable alternative wastewater treatment systems and approval of those systems to enable local government the freedom to allow alternative systems be installed, with the confidence to know the systems are approved by NSW Health
5. a scheme similar to SEDA's solar hot water system rebate should be investigated for ecologically sustainable water initiatives such as rainwater tanks and wastewater reuse.

Yours sincerely,



Therese Davis