

**Submission  
No 130**

## **INQUIRY INTO A SUSTAINABLE WATER SUPPLY FOR SYDNEY**

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**Date Received:** 24/02/2006

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**Subject:**

**Summary**

# Manly Council

Legislative Council  
GENERAL PURPOSE  
STANDING COMMITTEES

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Dear Sir/Madam

## **Re: Inquiry into a Sustainable Water Supply for Sydney**

Manly Council would like to take this opportunity to provide comment to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 Inquiry into a sustainable water supply for Sydney.

Council would like to congratulate the NSW Government on its decision not to proceed with a Desalination plant. This decision opens the opportunity for a thorough investigation of all possible solutions to finding a sustainable water supply for Sydney.

In making this submission Council will focus on the need for an open and transparent comparison between all possible options required to address Sydney's water needs. Without a rigorous environmental, financial and social assessment of all options the most sustainable solution will not be found.

Council supports open and public debate on finding a sustainable water supply for Sydney. To date the opportunity for public debate on the value of desalination compared to other options has been limited. This is particularly in light of proven alternate methods for reducing potable water at the local level, increasing cost efficiency of technologies, and change in attitudes towards re-cycled wastewater. These are detailed in the Terms of Reference c – g as addressed below.

### **C. Methods for reducing the use of potable water for domestic, industrial, commercial and agricultural purposes, including sustainable water consumption practices.**

Methods for reducing the use of potable water for domestic, industrial, commercial and agricultural purposes, including sustainable water consumption practices include:

- Demand management strategies;
- Recycling and re-use options at varying scales;
- Stormwater capture and use; and
- Development of "fit for use" guidelines and strategies.
- Sustainable groundwater abstraction where appropriate.

PS: 2647PSLJ

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Each of these options has benefits and limitations. However, as less than 2% of total water used in Sydney is recycled and Sydney has reduced water consumption by more than 10% since the introduction of water restrictions, Council believes the viability of these options needs to be meaningfully assessed and compared. (PENGOs 2004, NSW Government, 2004)

The biggest gains in reducing use of potable water can be made through the application of a combination of strategies outlined above and implemented at varying scales. For example;

- In Sydney, 17% of all households have converted to water efficient products saving 4.5 billion litres of water per year (NSW Government, 2004). If this figure were to rise to 50% of households an estimated 13.20 billion litres could be saved per year. This is the equivalent of the volume of water produced by a 125ML capacity Desalination Plant in 100 days.
- Sydney currently recycles 15 billion litres of treated waste water per year. Traditionally community acceptance of recycled water has been low. However due to increased community awareness on the need for sustainable water management, this is changing. With increased acceptance of recycled water to potable and non potable quality the potential to increase the level of water recycled beyond 3% of total water used is great and would significantly assist in providing Sydney with a sustainable long - term source of water (PENGOs 2004).
- The National Resource Management Ministerial Council (NRMMC) has recently released Draft National Guidelines for Water Recycling. Adoption of these guidelines by the NSW Government would assist Local Government, Industry and the Community to implement "fit for use" recycling strategies that would significantly reduce the demand on the potable water supply.

Manly Council recommends a combination of methods be investigated to reduce the demand on Sydney's potable water supply. The application of Desalination as the major solution will be environmentally and financially costly and possibly unnecessary if a combination of alternative solutions is applied to provide a sustainable water source for Sydney.

**D. The costs and benefits of desalination and alternative sources of water including recycled waste water, groundwater, rainwater tanks and stormwater harvesting.**

It is very difficult to accurately assess the costs and benefits of desalination with alternative sources of water because a comparison of these options has not been undertaken. Council recommends a Triple Bottom Line Assessment of all possible solutions be undertaken. This will assist in identifying the most appropriate combination of solutions.

The implementation of major infrastructure solutions as an answer to Sydney's water needs will have significant financial and environmental impacts on the State. A decision on the most appropriate solutions should not be made without considering the following issues.



**Financial impacts of solutions**

Continued investment in major infrastructure solutions will act as a disincentive for public and private investment in recycling and re-use options. The financial impacts on Government spending and long-term viability of all potential solutions must be open to public scrutiny before a final decision is made.

**Environmental impact and assessment**

The lack of certainty surrounding environmental assessment of the impacts of major infrastructure solutions such as transfers from the Shoalhaven and desalination must be addressed by the State Government. It is the responsibility of the State Government to demonstrate the environmental impacts of major infrastructure solutions as well as potential alternatives have been fully investigated and compared.

**Public Education**

Through a combination of public education and regulation Sydney's water use has been 10% lower than the 10-year average use since the introduction mandatory water restrictions were accompanied by an awareness raising campaign (NSW Government, 2004). Further investment in public education in the Greater Metropolitan Region would assist the implementation and improve the effectiveness of demand management options.

**The role of Local Government**

As Local Government is often best placed to communicate to diverse communities and is responsible for the majority of planning decisions that occur in the urban coastal areas. It is therefore in a position to play an integral role in community consultation and finding localised solutions which satisfy multiple objectives unique to each local government area.

**E. Practices concerning the disposal of trade waste**

It is very difficult to make generalisations about practices to improve disposal of trade waste. Producers of trade waste range from Council truck depots, to golf courses and local takeaway stores. Therefore the quantity and level of contamination produced varies.

As some industries produce highly contaminated trade waste, opportunities for recycling are often limited. However as part of implementing a sustainable water strategy for Sydney, Council recommends all stakeholders investigate strategies, opportunities and incentives for encouraging industries to use non potable quality water for activities were appropriate.

Ongoing and regular monitoring by Sydney Water of the volume and contamination levels of trade waste disposed should be adequately resourced and maintained.

**F. The tender process and contractual arrangements, including public private partnerships, in relation to the proposed desalination plant**

Council looks forward to seeing the details of the tender process and contractual arrangements and trust that these processes were undertaken in an open and transparent manner.

**G. Any other relevant matter**

Council would like to raise the matter of community consultation process that has been undertaken in finding a sustainable water supply for Sydney.



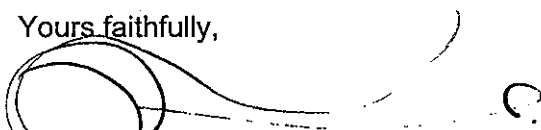
Much of the community consultation undertaken has related to the provision of information rather than meaningful consultation with Local Government and the broader community. To compound this issue any information provided occurs after making public announcements through the media. Manly does not consider this to be an appropriate level of consultation for an issue of this significance.

Ongoing identification of possible solutions to Sydney's water will benefit from a more open consultation process prior to development of future Concept Plans and Environmental Assessments. A transparent survey of the community acceptance of recycled water and an accurate comparison between alternative solutions to desalination needs to be undertaken.

Sydney Water and the NSW Government need to acknowledge that much of the public comment surrounding this proposal has identified that the majority of Sydney's community consider desalination should only be implemented as a solution to a water shortage in Sydney after all possible options have been compared and considered.

If you have any questions relating to the submission please contact Council's Water Cycle Management Officer on 9976 1519.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. I. Wong', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

H. I. Wong  
**General Manager**

Date 20/02/06