

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

Organisation:

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Subject:

Summary

As a resident of Sydney, I support the NSW Government's inquiry into a sustainable water supply for Sydney. I think the emphasis here is on sustainable and urge the government to give high priority to measures that will not compromise the long-term water needs of Sydney residents.

I appreciate the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. With the recent changes to the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, particularly the introduction of Part 3A, the opportunity of concerned members of the public to participate in the decision making process has been seriously reduced so inquiries such as this provide one of the only avenues for the public to voice their concerns.

The NSW has finally bowed to public pressure to abandon, at least temporarily, the ill-considered plans to build a desalination plant at Kurnell and raise the Tallowa dam wall by up to seven metres thus inundating significant wilderness areas.

Whilst this is gratifying and relieving to those who oppose the above measures, I feel that if the government had consulted more with the public from the outset, the plans would never have been approved and significant expenditure on the part of the government could have been avoided.

Now the government must look to the future and I strongly urge it to consider alternatives to desalination and dam expansion.

Desalination is an environmentally catastrophic way of augmenting Sydney's water supply. It has the advantage of not relying on rain but its impacts on the environment are such that it should only be considered as a last resort. It is now undeniable that we in Australia are feeling the effects of climate change. The current drought is not the result of natural weather patterns. It is climate change in action. It therefore makes absolutely no sense to deal with the drought by building a plant that will, through the release of carbon dioxide etc, significantly contribute to climate change. In addition, the impacts on marine life, much of which is already threatened by human behaviour, will be unacceptable. There are various studies into the impacts of desalination plants on marine life and they illustrate how devastating this process can be from both the extraction end and the by-product end of the process.

Similarly, raising dam levels should not be considered until all other measures have been exhausted. It is not acceptable to flood recognised areas of wilderness in order to secure more water for Sydney. The proposed expansion of Tallowa dam would augment Sydney's water supply but it would also transfer the burden of that supply to another catchment and, with Sydney's growing population, it would be a short term measure.

My chief concern with both of these measures is that they support what are essentially wasteful water practices. They allow for a once-only use of pure, drinkable water for everything from flushing the toilet to hosing down a footpath. In the case of the desalination plant, the cost is a massive increase in CO2 emissions and energy bills for the State and in the case of Tallowa dam the cost is the inundation of wilderness. All this for the privilege of using water ONCE before it is flushed out to sea? Both processes are wasteful, unsustainable and costly.

For this reason, I strongly support alternatives such as demand management, recycling and rainwater harvesting.

Permanent water restrictions have helped to make Sydney residents aware of the true value of water. They now think twice before they turn on a tap. They no longer take water for granted. These are positive outcomes of the drought because water IS a valuable commodity and should never be squandered, drought or no drought. These restrictions have not been difficult to live with and the public has adapted well, even enthusiastically to water-saving initiatives. There is no reason why these restrictions should not continue indefinitely.

Recycling is the obvious solution to Sydney's water shortage and it is a sustainable one at that. It does not rely exclusively on rain levels and it is economically cheaper than desalination. Any argument that the public will not drink recycled water is ludicrous. All water is recycled. The precipitation cycle is one big recycling plant and anyone who thinks that the water they drink has not passed through countless kidneys of all manner of creatures is deluding themselves. It works in other capital cities around the globe. It will work here and it should be given priority.

Rainwater harvesting should also be encouraged. People in the country have been doing this forever and it is a simple way of augmenting water supply. The government should encourage the installation of rainwater tanks for domestic households by providing incentives in the form of rebates and making

them mandatory for all new developments. I was raised on tank water and it tastes a lot better than anything I have poured out of a Sydney tap.

As I write this, the papers are reporting that the government is looking at tapping groundwater in the west. There are obvious problems with this technique, not least the fact that it is a short term solution. Groundwater ecosystems are too little understood to risk denying them of so much water. The impacts on creeks, marshes and wildlife could be extreme. It seems too great a risk when such viable alternatives are available. I recommend the government adopts the precautionary principle in this regard which is a key element of sustainable development.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to make submissions to this inquiry.

Jemilah Hallinan