

INQUIRY INTO A SUSTAINABLE WATER SUPPLY FOR SYDNEY

Organisation:

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Subject:

Summary

Submission to Parliamentary Enquiry re: Proposed Desalination Plant for Sydney

I would like to express my opposition to the proposed desalination plant for Sydney. It would be the largest plant of its kind in the world and we don't need it.

1. \$1.3 billion could be better spent on more sustainable alternatives, including water recycling, water saving devices for households and business, rainwater tanks and education. I've outlined some options below.
2. Alternatives to desalination have not been properly assessed or publicly discussed. The community has not been consulted about the decision to build the plant. The NSW government says the proposal is 'beyond public debate'.
3. The NSW Government has tagged the plant 'critical infrastructure' and is fast-tracking the project without adequate environmental studies or tests. No rigorous environmental impact study will be undertaken. The environmental assessment produced is based on a project concept only, not on a detailed design and it is not clear how environmental impacts will be mitigated.
4. Greenhouse gas emissions from the plant could add up to 1.25 million tonnes, the equivalent of 250,000 new cars on Sydney's roads.
5. The plant would be built on an endangered wetland. The plant is likely to have major impacts on threatened plants and animals on the land, including wetland birds, bats and frogs.
6. The plant is likely to have major impacts on marine life. Results of a study of a USA Desalination Plant reported a yearly rate of impingement of 55,000 invertebrates and 78,000 fish. The plant would discharge salty brine/waste straight into the ocean.

Instead of spending \$1.3billion on the system, and Sydney Water giving "up to" \$650 per household for water tanks, how about the following option:

Combine the \$650 rebate with money from the \$1.3billion, and supply a 50% rebate to the full cost of installation and connection for toilet flushing & garden usage (maybe cap this at \$1,000). At the same time, offer customers an interest-free loan to pay off the remaining 50% on their water bill over a 5-year period. That would share some of the cost with the customer, without hurting their bank balance too much, and would add around \$75 to the cost of the water bill (whilst also being offset by a reduction in usage costs, this may only add \$30 to the bill). A pensioner may be given 10yrs to pay it off instead of 5. The FULL outstanding balance would be paid in full as part of a transfer of ownership, like the normal water bill.

Sydney currently has 1.5 million households (source - ABS), of which 62% are "detached dwellings" (source - NSW Govt Metropolitan Strategy). This means that 930,000 households would be eligible for this scheme (the others being in units/apartments etc would have no use for a rainwater tank). This means the cost of the \$850 govt grant (\$1500 less \$650 already budgeted by Sydney Water) is \$790,000. This could be a staged implementation to ALL dwellings either upon sale/transfer or as part of the BASIX system, with a target to having EVERY household installed within 10 years. This would spread the cost. Also the total cost might even be reduced by Federal environmental grants (similar to the \$4000 solar energy grant), thus reducing the cost to the state even further - remember 50% of the total cost to be borne by the owner, as an interest-free loan, this "total cost" would be after any federal grants etc. Such a large undertaking would also drive down the cost of tanks, and Sydney Water could do the installations themselves, thus further reducing plumbing charges etc.

The remaining money could be sent in serious industry and storm water recycling, and spent via grants (and topped up by existing grants) for park watering (for councils etc) and industry use (such as is now in Wollongong or Port Kembla). The savings to Sydney Water of having to construct

water diversion from the Shoalhaven etc could also be added to this fund, which means the whole thing could be funded from existing money-allocations! Maybe some arm-twisting could see the commonwealth govt tipping into the coffers. They may even meet the \$850 on a dollar-for-dollar basis, this halving that \$790,000 outlay.

I look forward to some constructive ideas coming from your government - please do not become another Bob Carr. And please do not have a closed mind to water recycling, such as Peter Debnam when interviewed on Running on Empty on The Weather Channel. Finally, please remember - if the rest of NSW (including Richmond & Windsor), plus cities such as Adelaide and London can drink recycled water, then there is no reason why Sydney can't be educated that it is quite possible to do the same - and for a fraction of the long-term cost of de-sal and other non-options.

Please keep me informed about your decisions on this important matter, and on any further opportunities for public submission/enquiry on this or similar topics.

Peter Hatley