

**Submission
No 56**

INQUIRY INTO A SUSTAINABLE WATER SUPPLY FOR SYDNEY

Organisation:

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Telephone:

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Subject:

Summary

To Mr Ian Cohen, Chair, General Purpose Standing Committee No 5

19 February 2006

Please regard this email as a submission to the Inquiry into a Sustainable Water Supply for Sydney. I am responding to the Terms of Reference: "*c. Methods for reducing the use of potable water for domestic, industrial, commercial and agricultural purposes, including sustainable water consumption practices*".

I write from the perspective of a private citizen, home-owner, worker in a government department (and hence, a government-leased building), and user of public buildings and spaces. I write as a water-user and "water watcher".

I oppose the building of the proposed desalination plant. Although I am aware the Lemna Government has recently stated it will now shelve this proposal unless the dam levels fall to an even lower percentage, I still oppose the building of the plant. Scientists have almost unanimously stated that building such a desalination plant will only contribute to already high greenhouse gas emissions. It is beyond belief that the idea of such a plant was ever considered as a first option when other cheaper, more viable options have not been properly explored.

Nevertheless, our river systems, such as the Hawkesbury-Nepean and Shoalhaven, are suffering. We cannot continue to take too much water from these struggling systems to feed a city that is not managing its water sustainably.

Further, the recent "solution" of groundwater extraction may have major environmental consequences and does not present a sustainable supply of water for Sydney.

The State Government **must** pursue sustainable solutions to solve Sydney's water crisis. The \$1.6 billion dollars set aside for the desalination plant should instead be spent on:

- Recycling and stormwater harvesting. Sydney currently recycles less than 3% of our water;
- The promotion and installation of water- saving devices - in both private and public-used buildings (those used by private companies and government agencies);
- Increased and continuing rebates for rain water tanks in homes and businesses;
- Ongoing water education programs. Sydneysiders want to know what they can do to help solve the water crisis. Such programs should begin in schools and continue in higher education establishments. Media advertising reminding citizens how to minimise water use and consequences for not saving or reusing water, should be constant not occasional.

I take this opportunity to point out that for the almost the entire time I have lived in my house at the above address (25 years), I have continued minimising water use, including by:

- re-using washing machine water (in buckets) for toilet flushing ;
- fitting water-saving devices to the toilet cistern, showerhead and taps;
- watering the garden with washing machine rinse water wherever possible or re-using the rinse water for another load of washing; and
- sometimes taking a shower on alternate days rather than daily, and saving the shower water for flushing the toilet.

Some of these methods are cumbersome and time-consuming, yet I persist with them. The rewards have included reduced water bills. However, the main reason I continue saving and re-using water is because I am keenly aware of not only the impact of drought, but of the rising demands caused by Sydney's increasing population.

If I can find ways to minimise my water use, so can other householders. And so can businesses, large or small.

If more and more people insist on building and buying houses with two or three bathrooms and swimming pools, there must be strictly enforced regulations to ensure water-saving and water-reuse mechanisms.

Recycling sewerage for at least some domestic use - and yes, even as drinking water - IS worth considering. Millions of Europeans have drunk such recycled water for many decades with success. Those of us who have travelled to and lived in European countries have drunk the stuff and lived to tell the tale. Many Sydneysiders (indeed, people in country areas and other States) would be willing to try recycled water if the Government's approach to it was more positive and honest, rather than trying to frighten us with emotive language and imagery.

I urge this Committee to recommend that:

- permanent water restrictions be enforced, along with far stronger water saving, harvesting and re-cycling options;
- and that building a or any desalination plants be ruled out permanently.

Yours sincerely

(Ms) Adrienne Shilling