

**INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO PFAS CONTAMINATION
IN WATERWAYS AND DRINKING WATER SUPPLIES
THROUGHOUT NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 21 November 2024

Partially
Confidential

Senate Enquiry into PFAS

Submission to PFAS enquiry:

To the Committee,

I write with personal interest, as a resident of the Blue Mts in NSW, as one of approximately 70,000 residents of the Blue Mts, who have been unknowingly exposed to untested unknown quantities of PFAS over non identified years.

My concerns focus on various matters and issues with Water NSW who have failed in their core responsibility to test and deliver safe and clean drinking water to residents of the Blue Mountains. Further they have been slow to advise the public that the water they have been drinking may not be safe. Precautionary advisory measures would have been more acceptable to the residents exposed to these carcinogenic toxins.

Water NSW has failed to systematically test our water quality over many years, and cannot detail how long we have been exposed to the chemicals; when we were exposed, or in what quantities PFAS chemicals have flowed unidentified and unimpeded through the water catchment.

Water NSW cannot yet identify or confirm the source/s of PFAS into the system, and have failed to ensure that our water catchment is safe.

- Water NSW have failed in their core responsibility to provide safe drinking water.

Over the period of time where we have been exposed to unknown quantities of PFAS chemicals, Water NSW concurrently spent years with a focus on and arguing a case to raise the Warragamba Dam Wall. A publicly exposed and apparent flawed venture, said to be connected to developers who wanted to build housing estates on the Hawkesbury Flood Plain.

A proposal that independent engineers argued was dangerous and would potentially have catastrophic outcomes if the project had gone ahead, leaving thousands of new dwellings at risk on the flood plains. Water NSW's failure to ensure tested, safe drinking water supply coincided with their ongoing focus on promoting the raising of the Warragamba Dam wall.

The community spent years arguing against this obviously flawed proposal, demonstrating that raising the dam wall, would not stop 45% of the flow from other river systems onto the flood plain. Water NSW must have known this, yet continued to push for the proposal through a flawed EIS process which amended scientific data to benefit the proposal, and failed to provide adequate data. Water NSW ignored the impact the proposal would have on biodiversity and the regions significance as a listed World Heritage Region.

Accurate and comprehensive data collection would have brought caution to the Water NSW push for the project to go ahead.

At that time Water NSW wilfully ignored the deleterious effect that raising the dam wall would have on much of the Heritage Listed wild river systems and the biodiversity of the World Heritage region, indigenous cultural heritage, of the National Park and its adjoining areas.

Water NSW's actions in pushing/ advocating for the flawed Warragamba Dam Wall raising proposal, and their failure to be timely in preventing the supply of toxic poisoned water supply, gives pause for the public to trust Water NSW public responses to their failures, in delivering safe water supply. Water NSW have been slow to act and appear to be down playing the seriousness of PFAS pollution to the water supply of the Blue Mts.

- It is a disgrace that they did not prioritise ensuring our water was safe, clearly neglected checking the water quality of the Blue Mts over many years, while investing so much time and energy into arguing their support for raising the Dam Wall.

My second concern lies with Water NSW and Sydney Water who though bound by current Australian Regulations, standards which legislate for so called 'safe' levels of PFAS in drinking water, are relying on outdated standards, to pacify the communities whose alarm is reasonable and realistic.

It does not give me comfort that outdated legislation for safe standards of PFAS exposure, which is described "as safe", as we have been advised by Sydney Water, when Water NSW has not proven how much PFAS, for how long, what current levels are, and even now what the sources for PFAS entry into our water catchments are.

- *Sydney Water's recent readings of PFAS levels are in contradiction to independent scientific testing of the water supply, which proves that PFAS levels from various water sources are much higher than Sydney Water analysis has shown.*
- My third concern is that Sydney Water has recently announced they will be increasing water rates by 50% over the next few years in order to improve their infrastructure.

I argue that I should not have been paying for water supply at all, when it was not safe to drink, was not tested by Water NSW, that I and my family have likely been exposed to unsafe levels of PFAS over a number of years. I certainly feel unwilling to shoulder the cost of repairing Sydney Waters infrastructure when our health has likely already been compromised by the failures of Water NSW.

- Sydney Water and Water NSW must act as a matter of urgency to install appropriate new filtration measures to safe guard the communities of the Blue Mts.
- *Further Sydney Water and Water NSW need to be transparent in their giving of information to the public.*

In response to the public's queries, Sydney Water Head Office's efforts to minimise public fear, have understated at the head of the organisation what risk the public have been exposed to. We, their customers are not stupid, and we can adequately judge the standard of organisations by their responses to their failures in delivering their core responsibilities.

- The public need immediate action to ensure our water supply is safe. The public require trust in the organisations which are mandated to provide us with essential resource.

I miss the beautiful clean water we used to drink from our taps, water which is now being intermittently being supplied from other sources, such as Orchard Hill, where PFAS was found earlier, and is currently strong with the smell and taste of chlorine.

As it is now, there is no guarantee that our water supply is actually safe as too little is known about the long term effects of PFAS on human health.

What we do know is that residents of the Blue Mts have been exposed to higher levels of PFAS than lower in the catchment, for unknown lengths of time, at varying quantities, from unknown sources.

What we know is that Water NSW has failed over many years to test our water, and failed to act in time when PFAS was found in the water supply.

My health has been of worsening quality over a number of years since moving here, my digestive system affected and with no clear cause.

Various tests by specialists and through the NSW health system cannot definitively diagnose what has caused my ill health. I have only ever drunk Sydney tap water, having believed for all of my life that it was safe to drink. I have never used non stick kitchen ware, and have not bought bottled water, as I believed that Sydney Water's tap water was among the best in the world.

- I would appreciate it and suggest that Sydney Water should advise its Blue Mts customers when their water supply source is changed from one source to another. My energy company texts us if electricity supply is disrupted and gives us ongoing updates as they work on the problem.

Sydney Water should keep us informed when our water source supply is changed. As is the case apparently, when a supply plant is shut down for various reasons as they have outlined to my queries about "where is our water supply coming from?"

- *This would give me the choice to decide if I want to drink tap water from a nominated supply source.*

I have been told that we may have to drink water from the Cascade Dam water source if Orchard Hill is cut off for various reasons.

I hold my concerns close and hope that Water NSW will act honestly and fairly in restoring safe water quality to our taps, by investing financially in the best remediation systems available, and in obstructing the source of PFAS into our water supply, as a matter of urgency.

Water NSW appeared to have adequate funds when designing and planning the Warragamba Dam wall raising. Those funds should be averted to ensuring we have safe drinking water into the long term.

- Perhaps a better investment from Water NSW / Sydney Water would be to supply and install water tanks to Blue Mts residences to ensure clean water supply in times of drought, or in times of disrupted supply from clean safe supply sources.
- We should not be asked to pay for their failures to deliver their core responsibilities, and in their failures to ensure their infrastructure and systems are maintained to the highest standards.

Yours faithfully