

**Submission  
No 33**

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

**Organisation:** Clarence Valley Council

**Date Received:** 27 November 2024

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Select Committee on PFAS Contamination

By Email: [pfas@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:pfas@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Sir

**Re: Submission to Select Committee on PFAS Contamination**

Thank you for the opportunity for Council to make a submission to this Inquiry.

Clarence Valley Council is a Local Water Utility (LWU) located on the North Coast of NSW. To date, PFAS testing of our drinking water supplies has indicated levels at or below the limit of detection, which are below both the current and draft updated PFAS limits in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

A potential source of PFAS in both Council's drinking water catchment and waterways is sewage discharges. In the drinking water catchment there are numerous on site effluent disposal systems in addition to a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) operated by an adjoining LWU which is located approximately 100km upstream of the drinking water offtake. Clarence Valley Council regularly detects PFAS in its sewage biosolids and, as there is limited industry in its sewage catchments, it is considered the PFAS is from domestic sources such as non-stick cooking surfaces, cosmetics and clothing waterproofing.

As an example of the presence of PFAS in domestic sewage sources, in 2018 Council detected PFAS in sewage biosolids when decommissioning a thirty- year-old sewage treatment pond servicing 36 residential properties (i.e. no commercial or industrial properties) via a common effluent drainage system at the village of Ilarwill. As a common effluent drainage system, the household sewage was treated by septic tanks before reaching the pond, with the septage in the septic tanks being pumped out every few years and transported to other STPs. The only source of the PFAS found in the Ilarwill pond was domestic sewage which had not settled in the septic tanks. Prior to decommissioning this STP discharged to the Clarence River and so was a potential source of waterway PFAS contamination.

While the levels of PFAS Council has detected in its sewage biosolids is very low, LWUs are unable to control PFAS received at their STPs and have no way of managing PFAS from on site effluent disposal systems. Clarence Valley Council currently operates six STPs which have licences for environmental release of treated effluent to waterways, and the effluent discharged from each STP to waterways is a potential source of low levels of PFAS. Council is also proposing municipal recycled water reuse on sporting fields and golf courses, and there are public perception concerns if the recycled water contains PFAS.

In its most recent renewal Council's insurers included an exclusion for water supply, water treatment or firefighting claims connected with "any PFAS" (i.e. not PFAS above limits specified in guidelines). The exclusion of insurance coverage for water supply and water treatment claims linked with "any PFAS" is of particular concern as Council's sampling may indicate that the drinking water guidelines are being met but Council is still potentially fully exposed to liability claims based on public perception and concern.

Another particular concern is that the cost of managing PFAS contamination in the future will be placed on the LWU's customers as either the drinking water supplier or sewage discharger to the environment, requiring upgrades to treatment plants to meet licence or drinking water requirements and increases in operational costs. The cost of treating PFAS received by an LWU either via its raw water (for drinking water) or sewage should not be borne by the LWU customers. In particular, LWUs should not be considered as the PFAS "polluter" for environmental effluent discharges when Council has no option but to accept raw sewage containing PFAS entering the STP. Regulatory change to reduce or eliminate PFAS at the manufacturing source along a "polluter pays" principle is required.

If you have any questions regarding this submission, please contact Council's Manager Technical Services, Mr Greg Mashiah, on

Kind Regards,

Laura Black  
**General Manager**