



INVESTIGATION INTO WATER AND WASTEWATER SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THE GREATER SYDNEY REGION: Comments on IPART Report,

Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to comment on this report. I am a professional fisherman on the Hawkesbury River. I own a prawn trawler and operate from Brooklyn. I am a director of the Hawkesbury River Fisherman's co-operative at Brooklyn.

The relationship between Sydney's water use and disposal and the Hawkesbury-Nepean is ongoing and increasing in regard to the impact these activities are having on the system. As a utiliser of this River further downstream, supplying seafood to the community, I am heavily reliant on the health of the system along with so many others in the greater Sydney region. Commercial Fishing on the Hawkesbury River may be a smaller and lesser known activity in comparison with agriculture and water use, but its importance as a monitor of River health should not be overlooked. The value and economic potential of commercial fishing extends beyond provision and sale of seafood. The fishing industry has contributed to the historical establishment of communities on the lower Hawkesbury and promoted their character and appeal. The town of Brooklyn has always been regarded as a community of fishermen and oyster farmers.

The collapse of the oyster industry on the Hawkesbury as a result of the QX disease has dealt a savage blow to this particular community, and the effects continue further afield. The economic impacts of this crisis may be severe. I believe there needs to be an overall recognition of the economic importance of the health of the Hawkesbury -Nepean. It should seem obvious that resource health and economic stability go hand in hand, yet there seems to be a lack of direction and commitment in this regard from the powers that be.

The recent news of a complete reduction of environmental flow releases into the Hawkesbury-Nepean contradicts the Metropolitan Water Plan and gives the impression that we are running out of options in dealing with this water crisis. Scientists have predicted more stress and an increase in salinity of the Hawkesbury River.

The Metropolitan Water Plan also aims for much greater levels of recycling over the next 25 years. With the current weather pattern of sporadic and sometimes heavy coastal rainfall, we are losing opportunities to recycle stormwater. One would think that recycling opportunities would be explored with new sewerage systems. This is simply not happening. Sydney Water Corporation is proposing to sewer the lower Hawkesbury River communities of Brooklyn, Dangar Island, Mooney Mooney and Cheero Point by constructing a STP at Brooklyn and discharging treated effluent into the Hawkesbury River. This not only spells disaster for seafood consumption, commercial and recreational fishing, tourism and general appreciation of this area of the Hawkesbury, it is also backward and contradictory thinking when assessing and appreciating the situation we all are in with water and wastewater in the whole region.

The excuse for lack of innovation is always costs. If we are to constantly accept that it is too expensive for SWC to develop recycling possibilities then the private sector must be given opportunities. The price of water is destined to rise, and the whole community must be expected to meet some of these costs. The concept of "free water" is surely outdated, yet the average household consumer still lives with this attitude. If postage-stamp pricing is to continue, then an overall rise may be required. I personally have no problem paying for the provision of an environmentally friendly and responsible sewerage system, providing costs can be met by all members of this particular community in a structured and reasonable form. The concept of a better and more responsible service costing too much has always been a good scare tactic in keeping innovations such as recycling on the backburner. The time has come to address this problem. I am not an economist, but I believe the possibilities you have raised all may have merit and may be applied in a number of cases across the region. This diversification may be difficult, but I believe the most difficulty is in altering the status quo.

There seems to be too much emphasis on the financial success of SWC. At times I have to remind myself that SWC is not a private corporation, as their main ambition, to make a profit, is no secret. SWC's assets, as I understand, are the assets of the NSW state government, which is a government by and for the people, being the community of NSW. In addressing a water and wastewater crisis, should our first concern be the continuing profit making ability of the utility? Surely innovations can take place, especially with new developments, without SWC suddenly going broke.

Perhaps the lack of innovation is related to lack of financial incentive. Some regard SWC's lack of interest in recycling is due to there being no immediate buyer. Opportunities for recycled water transport and use must exist, especially at the moment. In my particular area, for example, possibilities exist for water re-use

in the agricultural and industrial areas of the lower Central Coast area, out of SWC's area of control.

It would be truly innovative to see STP effluent as a resource for recycling instead of dumping it in the Hawkesbury-Nepean, or the ocean. The ocean outfalls are still discharging primary treated effluent. There is simply no excuse for this, except the savings in not tertiary treating. Over time the economic effects of the degradation of inshore waters by the sheer volume of primary effluent will be something not even the deepwater ocean outfalls can hide, and the value of our coastline will decrease.

The large amount of STP effluent currently being discharged into the Hawkesbury-Nepean provides a wasted opportunity to instead re-use this water, reduce dam consumption and restore environmental flows. The value of the system can be restored and maintained. Its value to the greater Sydney community must not be overlooked.

When working towards the best solutions for this crisis, I believe all possibilities which indicate positive results in a number of aspects should be considered. Costs will rise, and all consumers need to contribute to a degree; areas of more expense should be investigated with the expectation of higher costs for these. Difficulty would exist in assessing the ability of consumers in these areas to meet these costs and the time frame in which this would be achieved, but this definitely, in my opinion, can be done.

I believe a change in fixed attitudes in controlling water and wastewater services will be the hardest thing to achieve. Once this has occurred, we will be able to look forward.

Yours sincerely,

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