
From: Brendan Guiney
Sent: Monday, 17 March 2025 1:28 PM
To: PFAS
Subject: RE: Select Committee into PFAS contamination in waterways and drinking water supplies throughout New South Wales - Post-hearing responses - 5 February 2025

Good afternoon PFAS Committee Secretariat, sincere apologies for the delayed response.

Water Directorate confirms:

- We do not request any transcript corrections
- We don't have any questions on notice directed to us that we are aware of
- Our answers to supplementary questions are provided below
- There isn't any additional information we wish to provide to the committee apart from the material below.

Supplementary questions - Water Directorate

(1) Are current filtration systems in NSW capable of removing PFAS?

Mostly not. The most effective technologies for removing PFAS from water include activated carbon filtration, ion exchange resins, or reverse osmosis. Of the nearly 300 separate water supply systems in regional NSW, only a very small number of water treatment plants are known to have these particular advanced water treatment technologies.

(2) What would it cost to upgrade all water treatment plants for PFAS removal?

The cost specifically to treat and remove PFAS for 300 separate drinking water supply schemes isn't possible to estimate at this time. Currently there is a backlog of water security and water quality investment in regional NSW in the order of \$5 billion, probably greater (ref 1). This level of funding isn't affordable for local government owned water utilities and requires co-funding from the NSW and Commonwealth governments.

It is important to acknowledge that only 3 water supplies in regional NSW have PFAS detection from initial screening tests in 2024 that were above the proposed new limits for PFAS in the Australian drinking water guidelines (ref 2). However, it is imperative to acknowledge that PFAS detections in groundwater in other locations such as Dubbo, Wagga Wagga and Central Coast present potential barriers to water security (not just water quality) as the water can't be used as a future water source or as a drought contingency without PFAS treatment technology.

A risk based approach is required to provide infrastructure where needed - where investigations indicate that the water quality risk is unacceptable. It is very unlikely that all water treatment plants in NSW will need to be upgraded for PFAS removal. Other factors include the total costs of ownership - the operating costs for treatment will increase markedly, and the skills and capacity of water utility staff to operate advanced water treatment systems.

(3) Should water utilities be legally required to report PFAS levels?

Water Directorate acknowledges that water utilities currently can choose whether to publicly report PFAS levels and are actively reporting to their communities. We wouldn't object to being legally required to report. Consideration should be given to whether other drinking water quality data should be routinely reported and publicly available.

(4) How does Water NSW plan to manage long-term PFAS contamination?

Water Directorate defers to Water NSW to answer this question.

References:

(1) Transcript of Joint Select Committee on Protecting Local Water Utilities from privatisation, Friday 8 December 2023, Available at: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/ladocs/transcripts/3183/CORRECTED%20TRANSCRIPT%20-%208%20December%202023%20-%20Joint%20Select%20Committee%20on%20Protecting%20Local%20Water%20Utilities%20from%20Privatisation.pdf>

(2) NSW government website - PFAS and drinking water - information and updates. Available at: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/environment-land-and-water/pfas-and-drinking-water-information-and-updates>

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The Water Directorate proudly acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country across New South Wales, their rich culture and their connection to the land and water on which we rely. We pay respect to Aboriginal Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal people.