

**Submission
No 66**

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TOILETS

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Date Received: 2 December 2024

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TOILETS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

OVERVIEW

Urination and defecation are essential human bodily functions.

The provision of clean, well designed and maintained public toilets is a measure of a civilised society. Unfortunately, many of the public toilets in NSW fall short of such a description.

I believe there are some fundamental requirements for all public toilets

- They should be free – unlike Europe where the old, women and the young are disadvantaged by having to pay for public toilets
- They must be regularly cleaned and provided with essential supplies – and cleaning doesn't mean wiping the floors with urine saturated mop
- Damaged appurtenances such as taps, toilet seats, cisterns, doors should be attended to promptly
- Toilets should be accessible and usable by all people
- They must have facilities for males and females
- All toilets must have facilities for hand washing and drying
- Toilets need to be at sufficient intervals in cities, towns and highways to meet the needs of older people, mothers and the young
- Ensure toilets are sited to ensure those using the toilet/s are not put at risk

SOME OF MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

For over fifteen years I have suffered from enlarged prostate which developed into cancer. In 2014 I had a prostatectomy resulting in a substantially reduced bladder and a minor level of incontinence. I believe there would be many men with similar conditions to me.

For all those years urinary urgency has been a constant companion with many instances of my urinating on the side of the road, in a public park, footpath and even a private garden when I could not find a public toilet. Because of my condition I have been to many public toilets in parks and roadsides as well as toilets in public buildings, shopping centres, at hotels, cafes and restaurants. Some have been very good but many are poorly designed, not cleaned regularly and with some fixtures not maintained.

I have been fortunate that faecal incontinence has not been an issue for me but there have been 'accidents'.

DESIGN FEATURES THAT I WOULD LIKE TO SEE

- Wall mounted single urinals as a standard in male toilets.
(The wall mounted trough urinals should be removed progressively and installation banned in new toilets in any building. The physics of male urination are such that a

considerable quantity of urine ends up on the floor or if you get close enough to the wall mounted trough you get urine on your clothes or legs. Urine does not come out in a neat parabolic stream! It starts and stops and dribbles! The wall mounted trough cannot capture all the urine.)

- In new installations the floor waste should be a linear catch drain below the wall mounted urinal with the floor graded to the drain to catch spills and facilitate easy cleaning. (The majority of floor wastes associated with wall mounted urinals are in the middle of the space so spills drain back out over the floor.)
- The actual shape of the wall mounted urinal is important to catch urine. (One local council toilet has wall mounted urinal with an edge that deflect urine back on the floor!)
- If unisex toilets are to be provided in public spaces then a wall mounted urinal should be provided in the cubicle. (Why should females have to put up with urine covered seats because some males can't be bothered or are too precious to lift the seat! But really, why can't women have their own dedicated facilities?)
- In new installations incorporate a privacy chicane entry to men's and women's toilets with only doors on cubicles for privacy. Most new installations at shopping centres have this feature but some don't. (I've seen elderly people struggle with opening the heavy self closing doors in the 'air lock' provided in older constructions.)
- In new installations taps should be sensor controlled to reduce risks of disease and make hand washing easier for people with a disability. This measure should also reduce the maintenance requirement for taps and reduce water use. (Conventional taps with washers require regular washer replacement and mixer taps often become stiff or the mounting nut becomes loose.)
- In cold climate warm water should be standard. (The public toilet in Goulburn has hot water.)
- The requirement for rails in disabled toilets should be specified and supervised so that the toilet seat will stay up. (At a local restaurant and at a local medical service provider the only toilet is also for disabled with rails etc. However, the stainless steel rail at both venues does not allow the seat to stay up – very male unfriendly!)
- Toilet seats should have integrally moulded supports. This makes cleaning easier and avoids a maintenance issue when the elastomeric pad in some seats falls out – never to be replaced!
- The seat fixing to the pan must be covered and not readily dislodged during cleaning, (The fixing arrangement in some seats is a cleaning liability. It has cover plate that is easily dislodged and the components accumulate muck.)
- Soap or liquid soap dispenser must be provided in all toilets.
- A hand dryer or paper towel must be provided. (I visit the little village of Collector near Canberra often and it has a public toilet with a soap dispenser and paper towel. They do a better job than many larger towns and cities.)
- The placement of toilet paper is important and should be accessible when seated or standing. (The back of the cubicle door is probably not the best location!)

- A conveniently located garden tap to allow hosing of the toilets.
- Avoid gaps at the bottom of the wall. (The new unisex toilets at Shoal Bay have a gap around the bottom of the wall. Probably to assist with cleaning. However, the gap allows wind to blow in which allows pieces of toilet paper, that women use to cover the seat, blowing all over the ground and onto the beach nearby.)

DISABLED TOILETS

Toilets for people with physical impairment or those suffering an occasional difficulty are important.

These facilities should be available to all and not require the MLAK key to access. Many people do require the additional features of a disabled toilet but do not have the MLAK key. This is an unnecessary bureaucratic measure that denies many people, with a problem, access to those features.

These toilets would usually be the most convenient for baby change facilities.

I suggest that paper towel be available in disabled toilets to assist with clean up in some situations.

CLEANING, MAINTENANCE AND FEATURES

The issue of cleaning and maintenance cannot be divorced from design and construction of public toilets. Good design and construction will reduce cleaning and maintenance issues.

Cleaning must be regularly undertaken using the appropriate equipment and cleaning agents. (I have seen a cleaner walk into a men's toilet with a mop, no bucket, swish the mop around on the floor and walk out! Not surprising that the tiles were sticky!)

An all hours phone contact should be displayed to address issues of malfunction, damage or vandalism with systems in place to provide a prompt response.

Maintenance is an ongoing issue which seems to be ignored often. Taps not working properly, seats damaged, cisterns flowing continuously, hand dryer not working. (I think hand dryer at the public toilets in Berridale has only worked once in the many times that I have used that toilet.) Cleaners may be able to fix some of the problems in malfunctions but certainly should be referring the problem to maintenance personnel.

My wife tells me that most unisex toilets do not have provision for disposal of used tampons and pads. This is not satisfactory!

It should be obvious that soap dispensers and toilet paper is refilled before running out but that is often what happens.

WHO PAYS

It really is important that we don't go down the European path of users paying for toilets. So the cost of providing, cleaning and maintaining public toilets falls to councils, road authorities, road service centres and businesses that allow the public to use their facilities.

Clearly councils need to increase funding for good design, a high standard of construction, regular maintenance, cleaning and supply of consumables. There can be a good return on this investment from tourism and better public health.

The toilets provided and maintained by the NSW road authority are not very impressive to say the least. Those that I have used (Partridge VC rest area, Ourimbah Rest Area, Hawkesbury Rest Area, Wheatley VC Rest Area) need substantial improvement in cleaning and maintenance.

The service centre at Pheasant's Nest is a regular stop for us on drives south. The proprietor provides cleaning and maintenance of their well used public toilets for many non customers and has done for many years. As far as I am aware they receive no financial support for this service. I think there is a case for road authority support for the service they and other service centres provide.

I think there is also an opportunity to coopt NRMA into the provision, cleaning and maintenance of public toilets. They are an organisation set up to assist motorists and have invested in many ventures for tourism. I am sure NRMA members would support such an initiative if they could use better public toilets.

PLANNING ISSUES

Many businesses provide toilets for customers. Some allow non customers to use the toilets knowingly or otherwise.

Some large businesses can be developed without a public toilet. Planning rules need to mandate that public toilets be provided and made available. In Scotland recently I noted that small supermarkets including Aldi had public toilets.

I hope that the inquiry can lead to improved public toilets in NSW and across Australia. I would be happy to appear before the inquiry.

Stephen John Weatherstone