

MEDIA RELEASE

Phil Costa
Minister for Water
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2 June 2010

GOVERNMENT RELEASES REVIEW OF WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Minister for Water Phillip Costa today released an independent review of the recommendations of the 1998 Sydney Water Inquiry into the management of water quality in Sydney.

Mr Costa said the report demonstrates the NSW Government's ongoing commitment to ensuring the water supplied to Australia's largest city remains of the highest quality.

"The quality of Sydney's water supply is something the NSW Government takes seriously, and this review confirms we have robust systems in place to ensure the water we supply to some 4.5 million Sydney residents is of the highest standard," Mr Costa said.

"This independent review reinforces the effectiveness of the systems this Government has in place to protect our water quality.

"The NSW Government moved swiftly to address concerns about water quality in 1998, and maintains vigilance on this crucial issue."

As more than 10 years had passed since the 1998 inquiry, Sydney Water, the Sydney Catchment Authority and NSW Health asked the Government to re-form a committee to identify how the agencies were performing against the original recommendations released by Peter McClellan QC.

The Review Panel sought to draw on the knowledge of the original inquiry so that there would be an understanding of the original intent from the time that the recommendations were made. It was chaired by Barry O'Keefe AM QC.

"The independent review committee was highly impressed with the improvements the NSW Government has made to protect water quality and is satisfied that there are appropriate systems in place to ensure vigilance is maintained," Mr Costa said.

"This is a real vote of confidence for water management in Sydney. The SCA and Sydney Water use a multi-barrier approach to manage water quality from the catchment to consumers' taps.

"The independent inquiry in 1998 resulted in 91 recommendations to improve management of our drinking water supplies."

Analysis of the O'Keefe review of the 1998 recommendations indicate that:

- 83 recommendations have been fully implemented or exceeded.
- four recommendations have been partially met to the extent that is practical, acceptable and appropriate given the ten years that have passed since the original recommendations were made.
- two recommendations have been superseded and are no longer relevant.
- one refers to ongoing funding and will be addressed as part of the annual budget process; and
- one regarding covering the Upper Canal is the subject of current detailed investigations

- into the most appropriate course of action. A deadline of 31 December 2010 has been set for the completion of these investigations.

“We know the Upper Canal will be the next major project in terms of securing water integrity into the future,” Minister Costa said.

“The Sydney Catchment Authority will report back to Government by the end of the year with options for upgrading the canal to meet future needs.”

Minister Costa said since the 1998 inquiry, a rigorous water testing regime has been established and maintained to ensure the integrity of the raw drinking water supplies.

“A key recommendation was the establishment of a separate body to manage the drinking water catchments – this was achieved in 1999 and the Sydney Catchment Authority has been working cooperatively with Sydney Water and NSW Health since then to protect raw water supplies,” Minister Costa said.

“More than 9,000 filtered drinking water samples have been tested by Sydney Water since the 1998 water quality incident. Cryptosporidium or Giardia has been detected 9 times. On every occasion NSW Health has said that the low levels detected do not represent a public health threat.

“Comprehensive water quality and quantity monitoring networks identify any water quality changes requiring action. Robust incident planning means the agencies are prepared to respond to and recover from water quality events.”

Minister Costa said 56 recommendations have been made in the Sydney Water Inquiry 10 year review chaired by Justice O’Keefe.

“The Government’s response to the 10-year review recommendations details how all relevant agencies will continue to meet and improve their water management obligations,” Minister Costa said.

“Most of these recommendations are already being met and we will continue to ensure they are implemented,” he added.

The full report can be viewed at www.sydneywater.com.au and www.sca.nsw.gov.au

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Background:

- The 1998 Sydney Water Inquiry into management of water quality in Sydney was established following three “boil water alerts” that were issued due to contaminants in treated water between July and September 1998.
- The Inquiry was chaired by Mr Peter McClellan QC (now the Hon Justice Peter McClellan, Chief Judge at Common Law in the Supreme Court of NSW) to investigate the cause of the contamination and public communication procedures in place for contamination incidents.
- The Inquiry delivered five reports, with the final report of December 1998 making 91 broad ranging recommendations.
- The review of the 1998 Sydney Water Inquiry was chaired by the Hon Barry O’Keefe AM QC, with the panel drawing on the knowledge of members of the original inquiry.
- The review resulted in 56 additional recommendations – the Government will be working with the relevant agencies to address these recommendations.