

Sydney Water has finalised a Pollution Study Report, *Vaucluse Diamond Bay Ocean Discharges*, in response to the NSW Environmental Protection Authority's Pollution Reduction Program (PRP 305), which required Sydney Water to assess the level of risk to the environment and public health from three cliff-face wastewater outfalls.

Background

The three outfalls at Vaucluse and Diamond Bay currently discharge untreated wastewater into the ocean. Sydney Water is licensed by the EPA to operate the outfalls, which were built between 1916 and 1936.

While these are the last remaining untreated discharges in Sydney Water's system, water quality at nearby swimming beaches (including Bondi) remains 'good' or 'very good', based on regular Beachwatch monitoring.

In 2016, Sydney Water responded to the EPA's request for a study into the level of risk to the environment and public health posed by the three outfalls. As part of the study we thoroughly reviewed existing information about the outfalls and the receiving environment. We also engaged with key stakeholders including government agencies, local interest groups and potential recreation users of the area. Wastewater dispersion modelling was carried out to identify the area of potential impact from the outfalls.

Findings

The pollution study found new information, including:

- The modelled (predicted) wastewater plume is larger than previously understood.
- Although the three outfalls are difficult and dangerous to access, about 2,000 people are accessing the area for recreational purposes (spear fishing, swimming, rock fishing) each year. This estimate was based on a stakeholder user survey and includes about 300 people participating in organised swim and paddle events.

Based on the information in the pollution study, the risk to public health has been rated 'very high' for anyone accessing the area in the immediate vicinity of the outfalls for primary contact use due to predicted water quality near the outfalls.

Risks to the aquatic ecosystem have been rated 'high' in the immediate vicinity of the outfalls since wastewater discharge is being continuous and the time taken to reverse impacts likely to be one to ten years.

An independent peer review of the risk assessment confirmed that, while conservative (that is, that Sydney Water may have over-estimated the risk), the approach adopted by Sydney Water was appropriate, the supportive evidence used was adequate, and that the conclusions drawn are valid.

Sydney Water is working closely with the EPA, experts and community representatives to identify the best solution to manage releases from the outfalls.

To know more

To know more visit sydneywater.com.au or contact our Community Relations team at vauclusediamondbay@sydneywater.com.au.