



Standing Committee
Environment and Public Affairs
GPO: Box A11
Perth WA 6837

4th September 2012

Petition No 166 – Cessation of the Chlorination of the Busselton Water Supply

Dear Committee Members

The following is my submission in relation to Petition 166. Please note this submission is divided into two sections - the first will address issues raised in the main petition and the second part will address issues raised in the children's petition - both of which form the tabled Petition number 166. Please be advised that I have not taken this complaint to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

In support of the Main Petition No 166 presented by Diana Michaels

Like the air we breathe, water is essential to all life on this planet - the quality and quantity of water we consume determines the quality of our lives and the extent of our wellbeing. Many people today base their choice of location and lifestyle on a place that offers the purest and most natural water source. Many have chosen Busselton for this reason. Historically and culturally, the source that Busselton Water derives its supply from - the Yarragadee – is revered and appreciated on all levels by the Traditional Owners of this land. In the present day, when the tide is turning, and awareness and respect for our original people and their culture is coming to the fore, when sacred sites and ancient knowledge are finally being acknowledged, protected and preserved, it must be addressed that the Yarragadee is THE most sacred physical feature of the land that Nyungar people were custodians of for thousands of years prior to European settlement. Even today, they teach and implore us to honour this waterway and protect it. While most of the sacred sites, burial grounds and Aboriginal history have been destroyed beneath the wheels of civilization, the current generation are finally awakening to the value of that which has almost been lost, and are listening to what the Traditional Owners of the land are saying. Protect and appreciate this water source before it is too late. And recognize that it has great power for healing and nurturing the environment and the people if it is not destroyed by industrial and corporate greed, and chemical pollutants.

So we have Busselton's water, a source unlike any other. It CANNOT be compared with water in other cities around the world, or even Perth water. It certainly cannot be compared with the water downstream from the cooling ponds of a nuclear power plant in France! (And yet that is what Hunter Water Consultants Australia, and therefore Busselton Water, appear to have done.) There is NO comparison between the two water sources and basing a decision to chlorinate on such information is negligent. Furthermore, comparing it to other water within Australia is erroneous, as the water chemistry here is unique. Our water source is very alkaline and basic scientific research will show that when chlorine is added to water with a high PH (such as Busselton's) it does not produce a disinfection result as when added to other more acidic water sources – it has an oxidizing effect resulting in corrosive byproducts that are detrimental to pipes, infrastructure and environment, and even more harmful to its living consumers – human, plant or animal. A critical consideration in this petition, is that the water chemistry here is NOT like other places and chlorination is creating a more harmful product, not a safer supply. This explains why there are so many negative physical problems arising across the community. And this will not go away – it will only get worse. Furthermore, to chlorinate for a pathogen that does not exist in our water supply, and has minimal chance of ever doing so, is dishonest. Using fear to base this chlorination decision on and convince people to accept it is morally wrong! The dangerous pathogen that the chlorine is meant to guard against, has never been found in a water source such as Busselton's, and there is evidence that the use of chlorine is not the correct method to treat it even if it did. UV disinfection is a wiser and more

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appropriate choice and that is what we had in place here originally, with NO ill effects on the community. Research shows that UV disinfection also protects us against waterborne viruses that chlorine has little or no effect upon.

These petitions contain thousands of signatures, yet don't reflect the reality, as they were gathered in the space of only three weeks. Many who would have signed were unable to in that time. But these are real people – a whole community. How can I bring their faces, their voices, their lives, to your attention? How can mere words on paper bring this home to those in power or who live elsewhere and do not wake up to this daily? **Every day**, in this town, fathers, mothers, grandparents, children and animals are confronted with the basic need for water to drink or bathe in, and cannot access it - these people are left with no choice and no access to healthy, palatable water, unless they have the means to install a rainwater storage or full house filtration system or can afford to buy daily water from the supermarket. It is a disgrace that the Health Department and many representatives in local and higher government will not respect or listen to the community or look at the research that supports these issues. Please don't be misled by reports generated by consultants who are paid to deliver an end result or information that will support an agenda of yet another office. Please take a look at the independent research as we have been doing, to learn more and become better advised, so that generalizations about water storage and delivery are no longer acceptable, and cannot be applied across all water sources as if they are the same. **Our water source and supply here in Busselton is NOT the same as elsewhere!**

We have an entire community being forced to BUY extra water to drink, bathe children in, and give their pets. Why is this necessary when they are already paying for their town water supply? I see pensioners at the supermarket checkout paying out their limited dollars to buy drinking water for themselves because they cannot tolerate what Busselton Water is delivering to them. I see relatives buying bottled water to take to family members in hospital or age care places, so they have something to drink. A town is being held to ransom over this decision, financially, physically and morally. Local supermarkets have reported double, even triple the sales of bottled water and hundreds of filter jugs and appliances being sold, since the chlorine was added. Sales of approximately 4000 bottles per week have been noted at one supermarket since chlorination, and there are at least four such supermarkets in this town which means a conservative estimate of 16,000 bottles per week from major outlets alone. That is an environmental disaster in the making when you consider all that extra plastic being added to landfill and rubbish disposal sites.

A whole community must not be denied the right to safe, pure, clean *drinkable* water! Residents should not be expected to pay water rates for water that is no longer fit for human or animal consumption (even pet and gardens are suffering or dying due to the chemical reaction). I have seen friends' fish and birds dying from the water, or pets becoming dehydrated and sick. I question what will happen over time as the runoff from gardens and lawns and parks enters our wetlands and streams. The first to die will be our rare and endangered frogs. If this is how it affects other life that depends upon the water, what is it slowly doing to us? A hot shower now becomes a health risk as it is documented that chlorine fumes released in hot water are more dangerous than drinking the product. This might explain the outbreak of asthma attacks and respiratory problems across this region since chlorination. Nearly every person I meet has something that is causing them grief, from plants dying, pets suffering, skin problems, hair dried or damaged, itchy scalps and skin rashes, sore eyes, asthma attacks and severe ear infections (documented by medical professionals as being caused by chlorine). This is NOT community wellbeing.

When I see children withholding from drinking water because they cannot bear the taste or smell of the water, that is un-Australian. When I see children now consuming sweet drinks because the drinking water is repulsive to them, when I see pets sick and dying and plants and living creatures suffering because their access to healthy water has been removed, that is un-Australian. When I see the elderly and pensioners forced to spend their precious dollars to BUY water that is drinkable, and a whole community protesting but

not being listened to, that is very un-Australian. When I see organizations creating fear within a community by advertising a harmful pathogen that does not exist, simply to support an agenda to standardize and monopolize all water sources, that is very un-Australian. The pride in this community is fading along with the general wellbeing. It is also interesting to note that Busselton has been one of the most studied and recorded communities in Australia, from a health perspective, since 1966, thanks to the Busselton Population Health Surveys originated by Dr Kevin Cullen. Evidence of the harm being caused in this community since the introduction of chlorine will become evident globally as time passes, unless this situation is put right immediately.

This decision cannot be put on hold pending ongoing discussions or more consultants. This cannot be delayed. Even today as you read these words, real people are suffering, lives are being harmed, and this harm will only continue to grow while the chlorine is in the water. Please stop the chlorination pending further studies and research by independent and reliable sources. Please restore the Community's water supply to the way it once was so everyone can enjoy its unique benefits! Like others, I have done many hours of personal research and reading on the benefits of UV disinfection as opposed to chlorination and the results speak for themselves. Globally, communities are turning away from the use of chlorine to more natural, safer means of disinfection. Please take time to do research, to consider the many unbiased reports and see the bigger picture that emerges. Taking away our UV system in favour of chlorine is a step backwards on every level. I am sure that in this instance, you have a powerful opportunity to make very wise decisions and set a precedent that the rest of the country, if not the world, will commend, respect and even emulate.

Please listen to the voices of over 8000 petitioners, and read the many heartfelt submissions. Please stop the chlorination of this beautiful water supply and restore a community's wellbeing. Thank you.

In support of the children's Petition no 166 as presented by Maya Spilsbury-Slee

When it was made public that Busselton Water was considering chlorinating the town's water supply, I believed that the voice of the people of Busselton would ensure that this never eventuated, as many prior surveys had proven the town's vehement opposition to such an action. And yet, with the chlorination now a reality, the voice of a major portion of the population was ironically, not enough to stop this action.

My children and I were very concerned that those in positions of power were not listening to the people of Busselton. There was no democratic process in the decision to chlorinate the water supply upon which a whole community depended.

We considered the proximity to the water depot of the majority of schools in this town – in Queen Elizabeth Avenue there are five schools, and a sixth one across the highway near the beach. Given the information that Busselton Water would be administering high enough doses of chlorine at the depots, to carry all the way through to the end of the lengthy pipelines, those closest to the plant were going to get the strongest blasts of freshly added chlorine. This has been acknowledged by the Water Board in the information they released. And that meant the children in those schools would be affected! Not to mention being very close to where such toxic chemicals were stored and handled, should there ever be an "accident".

My daughter and some of her friends at their school were talking about the chlorine and wrote a statement saying they did not want chlorine in the town water or at their schools. And all of the children signed it. Maya came home with the handwritten petition and I realized that these children were asking to be heard. I helped her type up a "real" one based on what her petition said, so she could collect signatures, as I thought it a good opportunity for her to learn about this method of protest. So began her first petition, though very informal and not legally worded. The petition got passed around to many schools as more and more children heard about it and asked to support it. Finally, with 378 signatures, she and her friends decided to present it to the Board of Busselton Water. A representative from the local newspaper went with them. The letter (attachment "a") and petition (attachment "b") were handed into the office to be given to the Board Members of Busselton Water.

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Unbeknown to Maya and her friends, this never happened. Several members of the board have stated they did not receive this petition, which lead us to believe that no one on the Board did. It was apparently responded to by a staff member and the children's voices were not heard by those they had addressed their concerns to.

Now the chlorination is a reality and has been in effect for four months. In the space of three weeks, 969 children signed the above children's petition, and that was without any help or support from local schools - it was entirely because the children wanted to have a say, and sought out this petition to voice their protest against the chlorine.

If 969 children could come forward in such a limited time, to sign the petitions, what would happen if every child in Busselton was offered the chance to have a say? And what would that reveal about this generation whose future wellbeing is being decided for them without their input or consent. These are the next generation of water consumers in this area, and they deserve a voice. If there is any truth to the many documented reports and vast research into the dangers of chlorine (and I believe there is), then we have a responsibility to protect our younger generation or show greater caution before mass administration of such chemicals. The historic evidence of the tragic consequences of Asbestos, Thalidamide and DDT spring to mind – they were all once considered beneficial, safe products to use. And subsequent generations paid, or are still paying, the price.

In my daughter's school, there are children who no longer drink water, unless it is purchased in plastic bottles for them. This is primarily because the chlorinated water looks, tastes and smells so bad. Also, many of these children are aware that consuming chemical products is bad for their health, especially when taken long term. And they are afraid to drink the toxic product that Busselton Water now delivers to them and their families. These children ARE concerned about their wellbeing now and into the future! My daughter has friends who now drink only soft drink or fruit juice, where once they drank water. Those who have no other choice, are putting cordial into the water just so they can drink it. Parents are offering these options to entice children to drink the water! How can anyone justify this! In years to come, I envision an official statement that the children of Busselton have bad teeth and then an "expert" will suggest we need fluoride. Let's hope that poison is not inflicted upon our community as well!

One 11 year old girl who was visiting our house confided, "I go all day without drinking the water. I just cannot drink it. But when I am so thirsty that I cannot bear it any more, I swallow a mouthful, and then it makes me sick". Her words made me want to cry. She was embarrassed to complain though because her parents were struggling on a low income and could not afford to buy in bottled water or acquire a whole house filter for their rented home. My deep concern is this - what is being done to a whole generation of our children, who we have taught to drink water for their health? And why should families have to pay for bottled water when they are also paying for the now "polluted" town water supply that is undrinkable?

Recently another young child, spent the night at our home where we have a rainwater supply. She spent so much time at the drinking water container going back for more water. I commented and she said "I miss living on the farm and having real water to drink. I cannot drink the water in town now, it just makes me feel so sick". She and several other students asked if my daughter could bring them bottled water each day to school from our supply. Again, I feel so helpless but also angry. This was another child from a low income family who could not afford bottled water or filters and she was also depriving herself of drinking water because of the current situation in our town.

These are just a few examples and yet this is the response I am seeing from children everywhere in this town! And this is why it is critical that the voices of the children be heard alongside the adults. They are being forced to drink and bathe in this water and have no means to bring about a resolution except to join in this petition or ask adults to intervene on their behalf.

Again I ask, **please** listen to the voices of over 8000 petitioners, and read the many heartfelt submissions. Please stop the chlorination of this beautiful water supply and restore a community's wellbeing. Thank you.

Wendy Slee

Attachment "a" – Letter to Busselton Water accompanying children's original informal "petition"

16th March 2012

To the Board Members
Busselton Water
And To Whom It May Concern – in our State Government and Water Corp

On behalf of the 378 students who have signed this petition, I am asking you –
PLEASE do NOT chlorinate our water supply

I have been taught that we live in a democratic country, so please explain WHY it is that none of the people of Busselton agree to this, and yet a small group such as yours can make this decision and force it upon our whole population!

The reasons you give for chlorinating our water supply do not make sense.

Your information tells us that the strongest doses of chlorine will affect the homes closest to the treatment plant - so where does that leave all of us children that go to school near your water treatment plant in Queen Elizabeth Avenue!!!! We will not wish to drink water at the school drink fountains. As we need to drink lots of water at school, we will have to take more drink bottles, which means more plastic litter in the environment!

The information you gave us also says that the chlorinated water is not safe for aquatic life and fish in aquariums and tanks, yet you expect us children to drink it. What will happen to our health after years of drinking these chemicals?

We have no say in what you are putting into our water, even our parents don't have a choice!

Our drinking water is precious and must remain natural – let people make their own choice whether to put a filter on their house water to stop bacteria, rather than be forced to put a filter on to stop what you have put into the water.
We are all asking you please do NOT destroy our natural water supply.

Yours sincerely
Maya Spilsbury

Attachment "b" – wording of original (informal) petition by children with regards to the chlorination of Busselton Water.

To Busselton Water Board:

Chlorine is not natural. Our water is!

If you chlorinate our water the whole town will suffer and will be angry especially us KIDS!!
All of our schools are close to your depot and will get the first and strongest blast of chlorine in our drink fountains. Is that what you want for your children?
You are endangering the kids of Busselton by forcing them to drink water full of chemicals.
You could at least have a vote and see what we want!
We might get sick because kids should never drink pool water – its bad enough that we have to swim in it and it hurts our eyes and skin!
We will have no choice, but to drink the toxic water or become very thirsty!!!
If we want water to be safer we could use filters in every house.
Our water is very precious to us.

FROM THE KIDS OF BUSSELTON (378 signatures)

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