



MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT; WATER

Our Ref: 42-10315
Your Ref: Petition No 126

Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and
Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr Ellis *Brian*

Thank you for your letter of 29 September 2011 regarding the proposed site for the location of the Mundaring Water Treatment Plant (MWTP).

The \$300 million project to construct the MWTP and associated works is a vital infrastructure project for Western Australia which services over 100,000 customers between Mundaring and Kalgoorlie. The new plant will ensure increasing water demands and Australian Drinking Water Guidelines will continue to be met.

The Water Corporation commenced and carried out a full and transparent site selection process, over 12 years ago, engaging with the community and other key stakeholders to identify a site for this critical water supply infrastructure.

The history of this process is detailed below:

- The first preferred site identified in 1999 was withdrawn in 2003. This was followed by a period of extensive community consultation.
- From 2006 to 2008, the Water Corporation conducted a comprehensive site selection process. In early 2006, the Corporation sought expressions of interest from the community and stakeholder groups to be members of a representative consultative forum.
- More than 200 community members representing a range of local community groups signed up to participate in the forum.
- A series of 11 community forums were held led by an independent facilitator. Site options for the MWTP were examined in detail for economic, social and environmental impacts.
- The Water Corporation conducted community tours of the proposed MWTP sites under consideration. The Corporation also undertook tours of operating water treatment plants of similar size to the proposed facility.
- At the commencement of the consultative process, approximately 20 site options were considered. Over the course of the forums, many of these sites were eliminated. This process reduced the list of site options to 12.

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- Following further community consultation, four sites were identified for detailed assessment against multiple criteria. The community at that time indicated a clear preference for further analysis of the following sites:
 - The Water Corporation's Reserve below the Mundaring Weir.
 - Pine plantation site adjacent to the airstrip.
 - The Mundaring Weir Forestry Settlement Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) site.
 - Firewood Road known as the O'Connor site.
- Members of the community and key stakeholders were also involved in the selection of 11 assessment criteria and determined weightings to be used for each of these criteria.
- The DEC site scored best in the assessment against the agreed criteria and was announced as the preferred location for the MWTP in February 2008.
- Key advantages of the DEC site included:
 - the site was already disturbed;
 - the site required only a small area of clearing of State forest relative to the other sites;
 - the proximity of the site to existing water infrastructure; and
 - the site could locate the plant within the existing land boundary.
- Voting by community members indicated that the DEC site was the preferred site over the Firewood Road site.

The Firewood Road site, which is the subject of Petition Number 126, was one of four short-listed sites assessed using detailed multi-criteria analysis. The assessment was undertaken by members of the community, relevant experts and the Water Corporation.

At the conclusion of the analysis, a vote by the community reflected that on balance, the DEC site was the preferred site over the other three short-listed sites. The preliminary cost estimate demonstrated that the DEC site was less costly than the Firewood Road site and also did not limit the treatment capacity of the plant. This site was subsequently announced as the preferred site for the MWTP in February 2008.

Following the announcement, the Water Corporation and the DEC in-turn entered into an agreement for the proposed MWTP site and the construction of a new DEC District Office and Depot on the DEC site. The new DEC offices have been completed and staff have moved in.

In more recent times, the Water Corporation has received submissions from local groups, led by the Save Mundaring Weir Village Group concerning the location of the MWTP, including the document attached to Petition Number 126 titled, 'The location of the Mundaring Water Treatment Plant: A comparative review of the Mundaring Weir Forestry Settlement (DEC) site and the Firewood Road (O'Connor) site'.

The comparative review of the two sites has been previously reviewed by the Water Corporation. The Corporation has concluded that no new information was provided in support of the Firewood Road site. It was also concluded that the submission did not holistically address all 11 criteria assessed as part of the sustainability assessment and consideration was not given to the weightings of the criteria. The weighting was an essential component of the assessment. It is also important to note that the wider community and stakeholder input was not sought.

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The site selection process demonstrated that the DEC site did not limit the treatment capacity of the MWTP. The initial capacity of the MWTP is to be 160 million litres (ML) per day, expandable to a maximum 240 ML per day within 35 years. The Water Corporation's planning assessment is that an upgrade beyond the initial 160 ML per day capacity is unlikely until 2030. Any further requirement to expand to a capacity greater than 240 ML per day is to be assessed at a later time.

A consortium known as Helena Water has been engaged to fund, build and operate the MWTP and associated works. Construction work has commenced on site.

In obtaining all of the required approvals for the construction and operation of the MWTP, the Water Corporation has followed all regulatory processes including:

- State environmental approval - not assessed and managed under Part V of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*.
- Federal environmental approval - not a controlled action and managed in a particular manner.
- State planning approval.
- Local Council approval.
- Works Authorisation under the *Water Agencies (Powers) Act 1984*.

In addition the Heritage Council of Western Australia has shown its full support of the Water Corporation's efforts in managing the significant heritage of the Mundaring Weir area including works associated with the Portagabra Forestry Settlement on the DEC site. A comprehensive Heritage Management Strategy has been produced and the Corporation has advised that many of the strategies have already been implemented.

Over the past two years, the Water Corporation has also worked closely with a Community Reference Group, which includes key stakeholders from local community groups. The Community Reference Group has indicated their support for the professionalism of the Corporation's staff throughout the site selection and consultation process. The Corporation will continue to ensure that the community and stakeholders are fully informed as works progress

The Water Corporation also continues to work with key local stakeholders, including community groups, regulators and the Shire of Mundaring, to ensure that construction of the MWTP has minimal impact on the environment and the community.

I trust that this review of the Water Corporation's actions and procedures undertaken in the establishment of the MWTP and the new DEC District office and depot addresses the terms of the petition and the submission.

Yours sincerely



**HON BILL MARMION MLA
MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT; WATER**

24 OCT 2011

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