



PUBLIC

Hon Wendy Duncan MLC
Member for Mining and Pastoral
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Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and
Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr Ellis

Re: Submission- Petition no 65, Water Quality in Esperance

I thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the petition relating to Water Quality in Esperance.

The petition is in response to continued complaints from Esperance residents concerning the water quality and hardness of Esperance water and the urgent need for water quality to be addressed. While the water may meet World Health Organisation standards for human consumption, the water is barely palatable but, more importantly, causes considerable costs to residents in damaged and corroded appliances and hot water systems. Esperance water is taken from bores and it typically has a water hardness of around 340mg/L. A water hardness of greater than 200mg/L has the potential to cause scaling.

1. Esperance residents

I have received many representations from Esperance constituents who have an expectation that the quality of the water supply in Esperance will be improved. Many people choose to own rainwater tanks so they can enjoy a better quality water which to them is more palatable and also is less damaging to appliances.

However, residents have become very reluctant to rely on these rainwater tanks since Esperance was identified in 2006/07 as have suffered contamination as a result of the export of lead carbonate through the Esperance port. Further investigations around the lead contamination issue also identified concern about the amount of nickel dust which was in the environment and evident in rainwater tanks.

Testing of rainwater tanks showed many had levels of lead and nickel exceeding maximum levels specified in Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. Fear of contaminated water meant some residents now choose to buy bottled water which is a significant cost and one they have to bear as a result of the actions of others.

The issue of damage to water heating appliances becomes even more pressing given the dramatic increase in the cost of water proposed by the State government, especially for commercial users. Caravan parks, laundries, laundromats and accommodation businesses will face greatly increased charges for the use of and disposal of water and yet the product they are having to pay such a high price for is substandard and damaging to their asset.

2. Desalination Plant

In the Department of Water's January 2010 paper Predicting the future demand for water resources in Western Australia, it states that for the Goldfields-Esperance region "alternative ways to provide long-term scheme supply demands are needed, especially as this region obtains its scheme water from the Perth water demand region, which will continue to be under stress even with the development of new water sources and gains in water efficiency".

Residents of Esperance strongly believe a desalination plant could provide the alternate water source required to alleviate the demand on water supply and provide a better quality water.

Land is available in Esperance to accommodate the infrastructure for a desalination plant and international utilities companies have expressed interest in the project.

Access to better quality water provided by a desalination plant in Esperance and a pipeline to the Goldfields will also provide diversification opportunities for the agricultural community and another water source for mining companies in the region. It also provides employment and business opportunities to the Esperance community.

As requested in your letter of 14 May, I confirm that I have not taken this issue to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations, (Ombudsman).

Yours sincerely



Hon Wendy Duncan MLC
Member for Mining and Pastoral Region