

# The Sydney Morning Herald

## Drop desalination plan: NSW inquiry

June 8, 2006

The building of a desalination plant in Sydney would be unnecessary if better water recycling strategies were adopted, a NSW parliamentary committee has found.

The report into sustainable water supply for Sydney has recommended the Government remove the Kurnell desalination plant's critical infrastructure status, saying if the city recycled grey water, sewage and stormwater better, there would no need for the plant.

Plans for the desalination plant were recently put on the backburner after widespread protest, but the Government has said if dam levels fall below 30 per cent then it would proceed with the plant.

"The committee believes that if the Government develops good water initiatives, the likelihood of Sydney ever needing a desalination plant is small," said the report, which was released today.

"There are clearly opportunities for Sydney to re-use waste water that would have previously been discharged into the environment, thereby greatly enhancing the sustainability of Sydney's water supply."

Chair of the committee, Greens upper house MP Ian Cohen said recycling strategies could resolve Sydney's water crisis.

"This report clearly indicates that with a suite of strategies that we can actually resolve many of the problems that we are facing Sydney with its water supply at the current time," Mr Cohen said.

"The desalination plant is clearly unnecessary to boost Sydney's water supply at this point at time.

"We don't have a shortage of water here, we have a shortage of proper usage of that water."

Nationals leader Andrew Stoner called on the Government to drop its desalination plans and harvest stormwater.

"Labor should immediately heed the call of the committee ... and implement large-scale recycling for industrial and agricultural use," he said.

Water Utilities Minister David Campbell said water recycling was at the heart of the Government's 2006 Metropolitan Water plan, and the Kurnell desalination plant would be built only as a last resort.

"Recycling is the focus of the Iemma Government and by 2015 the current volume of recycled water will increase more than fourfold to 70 billion litres each year," he said.

"A desalination plant will only be built if dam levels of about 30 per cent are reached.

"This is unlikely, because of our considerable storage capacity and the mix of other measures that we now know will secure our water supply, including the focus on recycling."

### **Water restrictions mostly unnecessary: Turnbull**

Water restrictions are mostly unnecessary, Federal Government water watcher Malcolm Turnbull says.

Mr Turnbull, the parliamentary secretary responsible for water, said there was "absolutely no excuse" for Australian cities, especially those on the coast, not to be drought-proof.

"We can make as much or more water than we need from recycling or, if we choose the most expensive approach, with desalination," he told a water industry lunch today.

Mr Turnbull said most people didn't realise water utilities were often run as cash cows and starved of money by state governments.

Hundreds of millions of dollars in profits were being directed into general revenue, away from investing in increasing water supply, Mr Turnbull said.

"In many cities, water restrictions are held out to be designed to protect and preserve a scarce, finite resource," Mr Turnbull said.

"The restrictions have really got more to do with protecting cashflows and the dividends of the government-owned water utilities.

"We do not have a shortage of water in Sydney or Brisbane, we have a shortage of management.

"Surely one gross political commitment today should be that all of the surpluses from Australian water companies should be invested in water."

Mr Turnbull's comments today were well received by the Mayor of Goulburn, whose inland town is set to be the first to recycle effluent into drinking water.

Paul Stephenson said the south-east NSW town would run out of water in 15 months if rain did not fall in the interim.

"To hear Malcolm Turnbull, and the major financiers here, being so supportive of recycling water, we take a lot of heart out of today," Cr Stephenson said.

Mr. Turnbull has promised Goulburn's 22,000 residents that the Federal Government would fund a third of their recycling project - about \$15 million, Mr Stephenson said.

"If a public survey due in three months comes back in favour of the plan, here's hoping he would be able to offer us the money before Christmas," Mr Stephenson said.

The plant could be operational in less than three years.

The NSW Government is expected to stump up for another third of the cost, with Goulburn funding the rest.

**AAP**

© The Sydney Morning Herald June 2006, Used with Permission