



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the supply of water to the Tharwa Community

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT
AND CITY SERVICES**

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**Inquiry into the supply of water to the Tharwa
Community**

Submission

Submitted by:

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Non-Potable Water

As a resident and ratepayer of Tharwa for over 30 years, I acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of the ACT Government to improve fire protection capabilities in the village.

Small scale, ageing, community-owned, non-potable water infrastructure exists in the village. An annual fee of about \$380 is payable by each household with access to the non-potable water. The September 2018, Tharwa Village Plan (page 43) outlines serious deficiencies in this system. I expect it is unusual in the ACT for residents to have to manage and fund shared water supply infrastructure.

The Tharwa Village Plan also notes that Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) owns and manages a second system which provides water to the public toilets near the village green and the Tharwa Preschool and old school.

The history of the development of the ACT Government Major Projects Canberra project number 3002648 - "Non Potable Water Supply at Tharwa for Firefighting Project" is long and complex and was initiated following a 2015 study completed for the Environment and Planning Directorate regarding the options for a non-potable water supply for Tharwa.

I believe the intent of the project is to benefit the community. Unfortunately, the direction this project is taking is contrary to this aim and is potentially an expensive mistake with negative consequences.

I am concerned about the project for the following reasons:

- The location on North Street and the consequent heavy vehicle traffic to the site during bushfires will unduly impact the village and impede traffic along the main thoroughfare. This could be potentially hazardous for people trying to drive through the village to escape a fire from any direction.

Access to the proposed site from the adjacent carparking area is designed to allow vehicles to manoeuvre safely in and out of the new facility with minimal impact on North Street. However, this does not take into account the proposed location of five fire hydrants along the northern side of North Street as shown on the August 2019 Detailed Design produced by SMEC Australia PTY LTD. If the five fire hydrants along North Street were being used to fill firefighting vehicles traffic congestion would result. Please note, the only other route through the village connecting Tharwa Drive

and Naas Road to Tidbinbilla Road is via Bridge St which is a narrow lane, not wide enough for two vehicles to pass each other easily.

- The proposed location places unsightly and industrial infrastructure consisting of two 188kl concrete tanks, a concrete shed measuring 11m X 6.75m X 3m high, a booster assembly and a 4500L diesel storage tank in the centre of the village opposite the preschool grounds, in front of the Tennis courts and in close proximity to a private home.
- The proposed location on North Street does not take advantage of gravity feeding opportunities which would be enhanced if the water tanks were located in an elevated position. In the case of a power cut the diesel storage tank will only provide 4 hours supply.
- Personal experience of the 2003 bushfire illustrated the importance of access to a good water supply. In a bushfire situation access by householders to a reliable non-potable water supply, with some pressure, would be a real asset. The current project does not assist village residents to protect their own properties from fire as the water will not be made available to residents ensuring that they are almost totally reliant on urban tankers and rural fire fighting vehicles for firefighting.

The location of the proposed new non-potable water supply is in a Strategic Firefighting Advantage Zone. According to page 17 of the ACT Government Strategic Bushfire Management Plan 2019-2024 Strategic Firefighting Advantage Zones

‘are strategically located corridors of land, located and managed to break up major fire runs that would otherwise impact on residential areas. Fuel management should be compatible with ecological requirements.’

Potable Water

Households in Tharwa are reliant on rain water tanks. During droughts and when rainfall is at historic low levels, as it currently is, households running low must buy potable water by the truck load at a cost of approximately \$19 per 1,000 litres.

The ICON Water *2019-20 water and sewerage prices* factsheet¹ says that “a typical Canberra household uses 200 kl of water per year.” If this water were to be bought by truck the annual water bill per household would be approximately \$3,800.

In Canberra residents on the mains water supply pay Icon Water fees of \$2.46 per 1,000 litres or \$4.94 per 1,000 litres excess and a Water Supply charge of \$140 per year for potable water.

The ACT Government has decided to release five new blocks in Tharwa. These households will be reliant on rainwater tanks, as are the existing homes. These new houses may or may not access the ageing and deteriorating community river water infrastructure. Connection will put extra pressure on the system and the increasingly scarce water resources but provide some ability to create a green fire buffer. It is essential that that this land release takes into account the pressure which will be placed on existing infrastructure. Currently there are 13 dwellings in the village core. An additional 5 dwellings would be an increase of 38%.

Suggestion

The location of Tharwa, nestled between the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and surrounding hills, means that acceptable sites for water infrastructure, in keeping with the character of the village and aligned with the Tharwa Village Plan, are limited. Design and siting are major concerns. Members of the community continue to work with Government to try to find the best possible system of water provision to residents and for protection in the event of fires.

The allocation of \$1.42 million in the 2017/18 ACT Budget was welcome but unfortunately the constraints imposed by the stipulation that it be used solely for firefighting purposes with no access by residents make it impossible to address the village non-potable water supply issues adequately. Revisiting this decision and coming up with a comprehensive plan to address the water needs of Tharwa as a whole rather than concentrating on a single aspect would be preferable. This inquiry provides an excellent opportunity for the Government to develop and execute a satisfactory system to better protect Tharwa from bushfire and maintain the small rural village for the future.

¹ [https://www.iconwater.com.au/~media/2019-2020-water-and-sewerage-prices.pdf#search="Annual%20average%20water%20consumption%20household"](https://www.iconwater.com.au/~media/2019-2020-water-and-sewerage-prices.pdf#search=)