



STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY  
Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Chair), Mr Andrew Braddock MLA (Deputy Chair),  
Ms Leanne Castley MLA

**Inquiry into ACT Budget 2021–22**  
**ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**  
**19 October 2021**

Asked by Leanne Castley MLA on 19 October 2021: Madelin Bayer, Environment Protection Authority, took on notice the following question(s):

[Ref: Hansard Transcript 19 October 2021, Pages 13-14]

In relation to: Effluent discharge event, 5 September 2021

**MS CASTLEY:** I have got a boatload. Can I just have some more on that? How much are we talking about in litres? How far down the river did it go? And what—surely when it was getting to a high level, someone was alerted. Has there been a new process in place to make sure it does not get too close to the top in case we do have rain?

**Ms Cheyne:** I will ask Ms Bayer to provide you with that level of detail, Ms Castley.

**Ms Bayer:** Thank you. So in answer to your first question, the total volume that spilled over out of the bypass dam was 20 megalitres. To put that in context, at the time it did spill over, and noting all the rainfall as the minister outlined, that was less than 0.1 per cent of the river flow of the Murrumbidgee River at that point in time, so the samples were taken at that time and then following and it was found that there was very minimal environmental impact. I am not aware of exactly how far down the spill went down the river. I can take that on notice and try to find that out, but it had very minimal environmental impact and was, as I said, less than 0.1 per cent of the river flow at that point in time.

**MINISTER CHEYNE:** The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—

The travel distance of the partially treated effluent that was released from the Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre on 5 September 2021 was approximately 2km to 5km downstream of the Centre before further diluting and settling out into sediment. However, some suspended components of this partially treated effluent may have journeyed further.

The rate of partially treated sewage decay is approximately between 48 and 72 hours. After this time, in flowing water, contaminants dissipate and the water is safe for human contact.

The above-average flows in the Murrumbidgee, at the time, reduced the toxicity of this effluent the further down the river it travelled. Due to different microbial responses to the environment, providing universal guidance on decay times and distance travelled is difficult.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity

Signature: 

Date: 26/10/21

By the Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Tara Cheyne MLA