



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
21 October 2021

Asked by Ms Lawder on 21 October 2021: Minister Rattenbury took on notice the following question(s):

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In relation to:

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

I have a question about the guidelines for recreational water quality. I understand they were updated in 2014. And that was partly as a result of recommendations which came from a report from the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. So I am wondering whether the issues about recreational water quality were addressed in full in the 2014 update to the guidelines?

And another recommendation was that the recreational water guidelines be updated every five years. Has there been another update? Or is there one planned?

Mr Rattenbury: That is a very interesting question, Ms Lawder, which I will see if Mr Walker can help us with. There is quite a bit of history in that one. So we will see how we go. We may have to take it on notice. But Mr Walker.

Mr Walker: Thanks, Ms Lawder.

A couple of comments. We do have a draft Lakes and Ponds Plan that is—it will be proceeding through to cabinet shortly. That plan articulates the recreational and, I guess, measures associated with the lakes and ponds in the territory. And it highlights the importance of those lakes and ponds for their pollution control means.

And is, I guess, remiss of me not to have mentioned already that the lakes and ponds in the territory have been designed explicitly to capture stormwater, and therefore any nutrients that are in the catchment find their way into those stormwater retention bases, our lakes and ponds.

So recognising that as their primary purpose, the Lakes and Ponds Management Plan then articulates where areas are suitable for recreational purpose, whether that be swimming. And in consultation and, in fact, undertaken by health, water quality monitoring occurs in those recreational areas. So that we can maintain and are aware when water quality if not suitable for recreational activities.

So that material, that process, is live and will come forward this year.

MS LAWDER: Okay. So are you aware whether the issues identified, can I just repeat, in the 2012 report, were addressed in the 2014 guidelines that were updated?

Mr Walker: I will take that on notice—

Mr Ponton: Sorry, I was just going to add, if I may, Ms Lawder? That I understand that those particular guidelines are owned by our colleagues in health. So in taking that on notice, we will need to just check in with our colleagues in health. They are not guidelines that are administered by or prepared by the EPSDD.

Minister Rattenbury: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—

In April 2012 the Office for the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (OCSE) produced a report titled *Report on the state of the watercourses and catchments for Lake Burley Griffin*. Four recommendations were related to public health risk management which the ACT Government agreed to and has adopted. The public health risk management recommendations and actions taken in response is provided below.

Following the formal review in 2014, the ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD) has kept the *ACT Guidelines for Recreational Water Quality* (ACT Guidelines) (October 2014) under review including in the context of national and international recreational water guidelines which may necessitate a detailed review. The National Health and Medical Research Council *Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water* (NHMRC Guidelines), upon which the 2014 ACT Guidelines are predominately based, remains the current edition and has not been updated since 2008.

ACTHD, through its involvement in enHealth, a standing committee of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) is aware of a recent 2021 revision of the World Health Organisation Guidelines on recreational water quality pertaining to coastal and fresh waters (WHO Guidelines). ACTHD is considering the revised WHO Guidelines along with any resulting review of the NHMRC Guidelines to determine whether a further update of the ACT Guidelines may be required.

Recommendation 1

The ACT Government (Health Directorate) undertake periodic reviews of the ACT Guidelines for Recreational Water Quality at intervals of not less than five years and include consultation with relevant stakeholders. The review should consider:

- a) developments in use of Enterococci bacteria as an indicator of faecal contamination and research on the health risks associated with regrowth pathogens;*
- b) improvements in knowledge and technologies to determine whether toxin testing or blue green algal concentration and algal biovolume testing is most relevant for ACT lakes; and*
- c) the characteristics and regrowth challenges of the lake embayments.*

The ACT Government agreed to a periodic review of the ACT Guidelines. The last review occurred in 2014, considered the OCSE Report recommendations, including assessing the use of Enterococci as the indicator organism of choice. WHO continues to use intestinal enterococci as the indicator for microbial quality of recreational water by either membrane filtration or most probable number method.

The NHMRC follows the WHO approach in the use of intestinal enterococci as the indicator for microbial activity.

In relation to blue-green algae, the issue of toxin testing, as well as secondary contact of algal blooms and biovolume testing, the 2014 review considered these would be addressed in any future review of the NHMRC guidelines.

Recommendation 2

The current Guidelines should be amended to recognise:

- a) *the potential for Lake or part Lake closure on a case by case basis, based on unusually extreme levels of blue green algae; and*
- b) *closure practices in relation to very high bacteria concentrations.*

The ACT Guidelines allow for, and provide guidance on, the closure of individual parts of the lake due to extremes of algae or intestinal enterococci numbers.

Recommendation 3

In line with the current Guidelines, the ACT Government and the Queanbeyan City council, should identify and map sources of faecal contamination entering urban stormwater systems, the significance of the sources, and long-term strategies for reducing loading. In addition, a rigorous and comprehensive procedure for rapid sanitary surveys in the event of elevated indicator concentrations should be established.

Icon Water undertake an on-going program of sanitary surveys of the sewerage system in the ACT, which guides refurbishment and repair programs to reduce faecal contamination entering urban stormwater systems. ACTHD has a comprehensive sanitary survey procedure that is implemented as required.

Recommendation 4

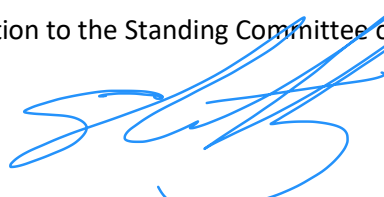
The ACT Government and the National Capital Authority improve communication with Lake user groups and the general public in the following key areas:

- a) *during prolonged Lake closures, so that Lake users are aware that the Lake is closed and why;*
- b) *during closures or restrictions, Lake managers should undertake random checks on Lake use, and where necessary amend public notification methods to ensure lake users are aware of the alerts and management responses; and*
- c) *when the Lake is reopened.*

The ACT Government continues to work with the National Capital Authority (NCA) in participating in interest groups such as the 'Lake User Group' to improve communications with recreational site users and the public. Both the NCA and Transport Canberra and City Services publish recreation sample results on their respective web pages which highlight reasons for site closures where they occur and provide ready access to current recreational site statuses. Additionally, results are published on new platforms such as the "Swim Guide" phone application and webpage.

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

Signature:



Date: 1/11/21

By the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction, Shane Rattenbury