

	A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE
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Mick Gentleman  
ACT Legislative Assembly

Dear Mr Gentleman,

In relation to information on environmental water flows published in the Canberra Times on Friday 18 May, 2007, recent proposals by ACTEW for augmenting water supplies with recycled sewage and information presented at a public forum on Canberra's water supplies held on Thursday 14 June, 2007, at the Hellenic Club, Woden, I am writing to demand that:

1. the ACT government discloses to the ACT public how it has spent ACTEW's \$93 million gross profit from \$168 million revenue in 2005-2006. ACTEW itself claims that supply is not scarce but that storage is inadequate - please outline how much annual profit is being set aside for future storage requirements and a new dam;
2. the ACT government cease environmental flows and eliminate the Environmental Flow Guidelines introduced in 1999 to reflect that, as a matter of human rights and public health, water usage priority be given to the public first and to the environment second.
3. the ACT government reject augmentation of ACT and region water supply with recycled sewage, which is both costly and unnecessary;
4. ACTEW provide a safe, inexpensive and unrestricted water supply to the ACT and region, as was originally intended and as our reservoirs would be capable of delivering, were they not emptied for environmental flows preceding and during the current drought;
5. as a matter of urgency, an independent ACT Water Authority be created to regulate government and private water activities and ensure safe, inexpensive and unrestricted water supply to ACT and region. A responsible government should present independent cost-benefit analyses to justify continuance of environmental flows under drought conditions. Any future environmental flows should be responsive to seasonal changes and restricted accordingly in times of drought in order to reduce wastage and not conflict with the original purpose of the ACT and region water supply;
6. the ACT government invite a panel of independent experts (including the authors of the attached articles) to formulate strategies and cost-benefit analyses for the future management of ACT and regions water supply and that this information be made available to the ACT Water Authority and public;
7. the ACT government build another dam at Tennent on the Gudgenby-Naas catchments (capacity as outlined in Reginald Goldfinch's attachment), if the Commonwealth wishes to continue to deliver environmental flows, thereby guaranteeing future storage capability and delivery of safe, inexpensive and unrestricted natural water for public use;
8. any debate about the original purpose of ACT and region public water supply be taken to a referendum, after all usage facts and figures and cost benefit analyses related to environmental flows have been disclosed to the public.

It is estimated that human water usage for drinking and gardening purposes comprises less than 4% (~17GL) of total available water supplies (494GL) for ACT and region. During the current drought, the government has let out a massive ~272GL of precious drinking water through environmental flows in drought conditions. It must cease letting out any further environmental flows. A new dam would not even be required if the original purpose of the ACT water supply system is honoured and used for public purposes, not environmental flows.

It is unacceptable that families with a one-person annual income of ~\$35,000 should have to pay ~\$3,000 per annum for 950 kilolitres of water – that is almost 10% of their annual income. The public is being led into thinking that water is scarce and that usage must come at a higher cost and be restricted. If the ACT government and ACTEW fail to remove current restrictions and deliver adequate water supply to ACT for consumption and private gardens, they may be accused of negligence by placing environment before human health and quality of life, as well as profiteering by charging high water prices in an artificially created supply crisis.

I strongly oppose the construction of a sewage recycling plant from Cotter to Stromlo or anywhere in the ACT and region, which would merge recycled sewage with public water supplies. It is not necessary in view of other options available (outlined in attachment by Reginald Goldfinch), it is too costly (outlined in attachment by Terence Dwyer) and it is not proven 100% safe (outlined in attachment by Peter Collingnon). The public are not money bags or guinea pigs. The average Jill and Joe already pay a large amount of income tax to cover basic infrastructure and services. Pretty soon they will start asking where their money is going.

I demand that water restrictions be lifted as soon as possible, including the abolishment of ACTEW's planned permanent reduction in water use per person of 25% over the next 20 years. It is insane to request the public to pay more and use less water outside of drought season. It is time instead to look at restricting wasteful environmental flows from our potable water supplies and eliminating the ludicrous Environmental Flow Guidelines which state that 'ACT water can only be used for other purposes once environmental flow requirements have been met'. The original purpose of the ACT Water Supply is to provide a water supply for the public health requirement of the ACT and region.

If our environment, industry or cotton farmers require water, give them recycled sewage and let the Commonwealth government subsidise it but DO NOT use ACT and region's public water supply as a stop gap measure. The public have paid for the existing natural water infrastructure and we are reclaiming what is rightfully paid for with our tax dollars.

At the next meeting of legislative assembly, please deliver this message: ***our health and quality of life is not for compromise or sale and the public is justifiably angry with the deceptive current state of affairs and user pays attitude*** - human health and quality of life must come first and the environment and profit must come second. The public really does care about the environment (our own backyards are literally dying under draconian restrictions) and that is exactly why our water supply is not for dumping or sale to merchant banks and investors.

Yours sincerely,

  
  
19 June 2007