

Notes for CRVA meeting with Linda Burney, member for Canterbury 14/2/2014

We met late last year in order to discuss the best way to take forward the campaign to reduce sewage flows into the Cooks River. We have in hand 320 postcards addressed to Barry O'Farrell which are testament to community concern over the state of the river. As well as a vision for the Cooks River that it will be once again safe for swimming, the postcard states: "Stop sewage flowing into the River so that it is safe for humans"

Our streamwatch tests show that the E-coli levels in the river are often 10-20 times greater than recommended for secondary contamination. Despite the already unacceptable situation there is a new and real threat that it is about to get much worse.

Background information:

After a flash flood on November 22, 2013, the Glenfield Treatment Plant broke down resulting in 150 megalitres of untreated wastewater entering the Georges River around the Oatley area. This was a public health scandal and rightly the community groups around the Georges River were up in arms, every time they complained about a specific area, the response of Sydney water was to divert the problem further down river.

Finally in a meeting with Rod Kerr from Sydney Water, Sharyn Cullis from the Georges River Environmental Alliance said that they were so shocked and disappointed that Sydney Water did not have a strategy for the whole of the river, and that diverting the problem elsewhere was not a solution. At that point Rod Kerr stormed out of the meeting, still with 10 or more slides left unshown or discussed.

Then on 16 December 2013, we read a report in the Sydney Morning Herald stating that Sydney Water are seeking approval from the NSW Environment Protection Authority to ease some of its long term discharge targets.

*"The corporation wants to shift the impact of the discharges rather than their number. One option would be to divert discharges so that more of them occur further along the main sewer line into the Cooks River or east of Sydney Airport, where tidal movements allow for easier dispersal"* (Making a stink about stormwater SMH 16/2/13)

We now know that is indeed the case and that Sydney Water is applying for revision of its Southern Sydney Overflow Licence. This has been revealed by Mark Gifford, Chief Environmental Regulator NSW EPA in meetings with the Botany Bay Catchment Alliance.

This is despite the fact that the existing level of discharges into the river are already unacceptable. *"One discharge point on the Cooks River itself has had 217 discharge events over the decade – or more than five times the goal – with each averaging 12 megalitres, Sydney Water said"* (Making a stink about stormwater SMH 16/2/13)

In light of this alarming development the Botany Bay and Catchment Alliance and other community groups including the CRVA are contacting Mark Gifford to request that the EPA require Sydney Water to undertake public consultation so that the community can be confident that the approach they are proposing is acceptable.

Perhaps mention of this could be raised in Parliament and we would like to consider the best use of our 320 signed postcards to the Premier to maximise our publicity efforts to draw attention to this issue.

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