

**MM-2 MAYORAL MINUTE - SEWER OVERFLOWS IN CITY OF
CANADA BAY**

Department Executive Services

Author Initials: AT

REPORT

There has been recent press attention on a Sydney Water proposal to construct a sewer overflow in Menzies Reserve.

The NSW Government's Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) acknowledges that sewerage leaking and overflowing into local waterways is a major pollution problem and that most urban waterways contain dangerously high levels of sewerage contamination after rain.

It is recommended by OEH that swimming in estuarine areas be avoided for at least three (3) days after heavy rain. OEH Beachwatch notes that exposure to contaminated water can cause severe contagious infection.

The Sydney Water sewer system services the whole City of Canada Bay area, transporting waste to treatment plants. The operation of the system is controlled by a license issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Sewer systems need to be designed in a fail safe way to reduce the possibility of a blockage or overload causing an uncontrolled surcharge inside a dwelling or in another undesirable location. Hence relief structures (designed overflow points) are built into the system. There are an estimated 3,000 designed overflow points in Sydney Water's sewerage system and several hundred in our city.

While these designed overflow points are necessary for public health and safety, it is obviously desirable to reduce overflows to an absolute minimum.

There are two general types of overflows. Firstly, dry weather overflows, the more obvious of these are generally caused by a blockage of some kind. Roots may invade a sewer and gradually block it or cause a sudden blockage when some debris catches on the root. Importantly, there is little or no monitoring of this kind of overflow. Response relies on complaints and can be slow. Alternatively a Pumping Station failure may cause a dry weather overflow. However pumping stations are well monitored and most failures are repaired before an overflow occurs. More insidious are the slow leaks from broken pipes and pits called "exfiltration".

Frequency of dry weather overflows has recently been highlighted because of the effect on our Water for Our Community stormwater harvesting plant. Dry weather sewer contamination of flows in St Lukes Stormwater Canal in Concord has caused the plant to shut down on a regular basis.

Secondly, wet weather overflows are caused by illegal connection of stormwater to the sewer, infiltration through cracked pipes and pits and by surface flows to improperly maintained yard gullies. Due to these factors, wet weather flows in Sydney can greatly exceed the capacity of the sewer system.

Since wet weather overflows are caused by illegal connections and infiltration through aging infrastructure, they can be reduced by renewals, maintenance programs and enforcement.

Sydney Water has been undertaking work to meet its EPA licence requirements, by reducing overflows and repairing sewers under the name of “SewerFix” since about 2006, claiming *“The SewerFix Program improves flow in pipes, reduces overflows and helps protect the local environment and public health.”*

It appears that in the last 5-10 years, Sydney Water has changed emphasis away from testing for illegal connections and enforcement of the plumbing regulations, which is a labour intensive task, to a position more of accepting of overflows.

It may not be a coincidence that at the same time, the NSW Government has been demanding increasing dividends from the corporatized Sydney Water. The Sydney Water Summary Annual Report 2014-15 shows the dividend paid back to the NSW Government growing from \$230m in 2010-11 to \$664m in 2014-15.

The NSW Government, Sydney Water, and OEH need to do more to maintain the improvement in receiving water quality and amenity.

RECOMMENDATION

1. THAT Council call for the Office of Environment and Heritage and Sydney Water to commence monitoring and reporting of dry weather sewage overflows.
2. THAT Council call for the implementation by Sydney Water of a program to reduce wet weather sewer overflows including:-
 - a) Not installing any new sewerage overflow outlets in environmentally sensitive areas
 - b) Increased action to police, to prevent and remove illegal connections
 - c) Increased maintenance and renewal to improve the integrity of the sewer network
 - d) An ongoing education program to increase public awareness of the consequences of illegal connections.
3. THAT Sydney Water representatives be invited to the Councillor Workshop on Tuesday, 22 March 2016, to address Council regarding the proposed wet weather sewer overflows.

Attachments:

1. ABC News Article
2. Daily Telegraph News Article



Sewage to be spilled into Sydney Harbour under NSW Government plan a cheap fix, Opposition says

By state political reporter Sarah Gerathy

Updated March 03, 2016 16:36:07

Sydney Water should not be reverting to building old-fashioned sewage outfalls that will pump untreated effluent into Sydney Harbour when so much has been done to clean it up, the New South Wales Opposition says.

The organisation is constructing 25 new overflow pipes around the harbour and other waterways, including planned structures at Mosman and Putney and one that is about to be built at Drummoyne Wharf.

In a statement, Sydney Water said the pipe at Drummoyne would be positioned about eight metres out into the Parramatta River and the overflow was only expected about twice a year.

"The position of the wastewater emergency relief structure minimises any impacts to human health and on aquatic species and vegetation habitat," the statement said.

"The wastewater released during extreme wet weather is highly diluted and is around 99 per cent water."

Sydney Water said the outflows were regulated by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and prevented the sewage from overflowing back into people's bathrooms and laundries during extremely heavy rain.

It said similar measures were widely used in all wastewater networks across Australia and around the globe.

But Labor's environment spokeswoman Penny Sharpe said the new outfalls were outdated and a "cheap fix".

"In 2016 there should not be 25 locations where raw sewage is finding its way into our water ways," she said.

"There are modern solutions where sewage is not just simply pumped into the waterways yet it appears that Sydney Water just do not have the money to be fixing it and that is unacceptable."

She said there were solutions available that were able to store effluent during stormwater events.

"They are then able to treat it and release it in a safe way," Ms Sharpe said.

"We've spent decades cleaning up Sydney Harbour.

"This is a backwards step and a quick fix if we allow raw sewerage just to go back into the waterways every time it rains."

'No deterioration in the situation': Premier

But NSW Premier Mike Baird said the use of overflow pipes was a common practice that had been used on regular occasions.

"The advice I have is there is no deterioration in the situation, there is stormwater that runs off regardless," he said.

"What they're trying to do specifically in this instance is to look at a situation where stormwater comes into local sewage and has impacts at local residences and their land."

Mr Baird said this situation would only happen in "heavy, heavy rainfall".

He said it was best to rely on the experts to provide a solution.

"Those experts at Sydney Water are consulting with EPA and Health [Department] and providing appropriate solutions," Mr Baird said.

"I think Sydney water is doing everything it can be and should be to ensure customers are looked after and there is no negative impact in terms of the overall solutions they are providing."

Mr Baird said on an ongoing basis Sydney Water would have to make significant infrastructure decisions impacting entire communities or regions, together with bespoke solutions for a smaller amount of households.

"What Sydney Water must do is make appropriate decisions in those circumstances and must make sure there is value for

taxpayers in those circumstances.

"Obviously, they want to invest as required but want to keep our waters bills as low as possible and that's overseen by a regulator."

Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore said the harbour was the city's "jewel".

"To be talking about polluting the harbour with outfalls now is again going back to the 50s," Cr Moore said.

Dividends should be put into modern fixes: Opposition

Labor's Ms Sharpe said Sydney Water's actions came at a time when the Government had been increasing the dividends it had been taking from water utilities.

She cited figures from a recent auditor-general's report, which showed that from 2014 to 2015 the dividend the Government took from Sydney Water increased by \$412 million.

When combined with the increased dividends from other water utilities, Ms Sharpe said the Government was raking in an extra \$1 billion.

"The auditor-general indicated that last year the Government took \$1 billion out of water utilities to go into consolidate revenue for the Government," she said.

"It needs to be allocating some of that money to modern infrastructure fixes that are going to ensure that raw sewage doesn't end up in the harbour.

"The Government has gouged Sydney Water to bump up its bottom line; that's clear from the budget papers and it's clear from the figures from the auditor-general."

Sydney Water defended its spending on sewerage infrastructure.

"Sydney Water's expenditure on wastewater infrastructure alone last financial year was over \$358 million and we have invested over \$2 billion in total capital expenditure since financial year 2010-2011," a spokesman said.

A spokeswoman from the office of Minister for Primary Industries, Lands and Water Niall Blair denied the dividend payments were taking away from infrastructure.

"Sydney Water's dividend payments to government are not expected to place additional pressure on services, quality or reliability," she said in a statement.

"Sydney Water continues to make significant investment in the city's water infrastructure to ensure the reliability of the system and the protection of public health and the environment."

Topics: state-parliament, government-and-politics, water-management, environment, sydney-2000

First posted March 03, 2016 09:42:14

QVZ



Sydney Water's new overflow plan will release untreated sewage into our river jewels

N March 3, 2016 12:00am

P EXCLUSIVE Matthew Benns The Daily Telegraph



NSW opposition leader Luke Foley at Mrs Macquaries chair in Sydney today decries the plan to build outflow pipes.
Picture: John Grainger

- **State accused of taking cash that should be spent on upgrades**
- **Sydney Water forced to look at 'cheap and nasty solutions'**
- **They will be polluting Parramatta River like they did 100 years ago'**
- **25 outfalls to affect Mosman, Concord, Shellharbour and Wollongong**

Opposition Leader Luke Foley said Sydney was heading back in time with its plan to pump more effluent into Sydney's waterways.

The Daily Telegraph revealed this morning that the state government was about to start work on the first of 25 overflow pipes that will take the pressure off failing infrastructure.

"The government is gouging almost \$1 billion from Sydney Water customers in dividends and payments," Mr Foley said at a press conference beside the Harbour at Mrs Macquarie's Chair.

"This means Sydney Water is forced to look at cheap and nasty solutions for managing wastewater, which includes dumping raw sewage straight into Sydney Harbour.



NSW shadow minister for the environment Penny Sharp & NSW opposition leader Luke Foley at Mrs Macquaries chair in Sydney. pic John Grainger

"This is taking Sydney back to the days of the horse and buggy and tossing bed pans in the gutter," he said.

Residents near Drummoyne Wharf, where the new overflow pipe is about to be installed, are already dealing with raw sewage inundating their homes during storms and are calling for a review of the decision.

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"They will be polluting the Parramatta River like they did 100 years ago," resident Dr Malcolm Wong said.

"Sydney Water should come up with a better solution. The present drains and pumps are already not coping with sewage from existing properties."



A map of the affected areas.

Jeff Angel, executive director of the Total Environment Centre, dismissed Sydney Water's claims that the discharge was 99 per cent water.

"They are trying to give the impression that what they are dumping is clean material," he said. "It is a mix of heavy metals, micro-plastics, run-off from the streets and nutrients and when they flow into our waterways they create a toxic plume."

Opposition environment spokeswoman Penny Sharpe said: "Successive governments have spent the last three decades building a sewerage network that stops untreated waste getting into Sydney Harbour."

"This is what happens when a government puts dividends above water quality."



Drummoyne residents Peter Stitt, Moe Wick, Dr Malcolm Wong and Alex Stitt / Picture: Toby Zerna

Sydney Water's "Internal Surcharge Improvement Program" will see 25 new outfalls built by 2017 that will pump effluent and stormwater into waterways across the catchment, including the harbourside suburbs of Mosman, Putney, Concord and Drummoyne. There will also be four in the Illawarra, at Fairy Meadow, Keiraville, Shellharbour and Wollongong.

Overflow pipes feed into many parts of Sydney Harbour where sewage would otherwise back up into peoples' homes.

In 2001 a modern solution appeared with the completion of the \$466 million Northside Storage Tunnel, which stores overflow until a storm passes and it can be treated.

Drummoyne resident Moe Wick said there had been little consultation with residents, who had only been told sewage would be "screened" to remove the lumps.



Rose Bay, one of Sydney's water jewels / Picture: John Appleyard

"There is really nobody in charge. The whole project looks as though it was knocked up over a beer," he said.

Failing infrastructure has already cost Sydney Water money. Two weeks ago the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) fined Sydney Water \$15,000 after five million litres of raw sewage was discharged into Woolloomare Bay when the Cronulla Sewage Pumping Station lost power in August.

And Sydney Water was fined another \$15,000 in December when a blocked sewerage pipe caused 1.4 million litres of raw sewage to flow into Bardwell Creek, killing fish and eels in September last year.



A Sydney Water spokesman said the new pipe at Drummoyne would go 8m into the Parramatta River and was only expected to overflow "twice per year" with the outflow made up of "99 per cent water".

"Sydney Water has a network of emergency relief structures across Sydney Water's area of operations, regulated by the Environment Protection Authority," he said.

The spokesman said \$358 million had been spent on infrastructure last year.

A spokesman for Primary Industries Minister Niall Blair said: "The government is committed to ensuring a secure and safe wastewater system."

'It's disgusting ... the kids swim nearby'

Matthew Bamford

Sydney Harbour has always been a sanctuary for Jennifer Warren but the young Drummoyne mum says she won't be letting her son Sebastian swim in its waters knowing it will be used as a dumping ground for untreated sewage.

Ms Warren was among a host of angry Sydney residents to yesterday voice their outrage at plans to build a new outfall pipe at Drummoyne Wharf.

"It's disgusting. This has always been a clean area. The kids swim at the beach nearby, it's unhygienic. Who would want that," she said.



Drummoyne residents Jennifer Warren and son Sebastian / Picture: Toby Zerna

Long-term resident Graham Paton said he was horrified by the construction of an overflow pipe near his home: "It will be terrible, I already can't use the pontoon because of wash from the ferries, now any sewage will be pushed around by that wash.

"You're better off improving the existing infrastructure than putting (sewage) into the Harbour."

Jim Scott, who moved into a harbourside apartment overlooking the proposed outlet six months ago, described the pipe as a short-term fix: "We knew they were going to do some drainage work but we didn't know the extent of what they wanted to do.

"I can't stand short-term solutions We're extremely disappointed the representations (the body corporate) made were not listened to.

"It would be good to know what the plans are. The situation is only going to get worse."



Jade Scott-Rogers 5 throws a fishing line into the area where the proposed sewerage pipe will come out at Drummoyne. Picture: Toby Zerna

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