

Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance (Inc)

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**Submission to Hunter Water regarding Belmont Drought Response
Desalination Plant**

Application Number

SSI-8896

17 December 2019

To Whom It May Concern

On behalf of the Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance Inc. (the Alliance), I, Robyn Charlton, Chair, am making this submission to the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment in response to the proposed Hunter Water Drought Response Desalination Plant at Belmont.

With anticipated population growth and with current water-use demands, we would encourage Hunter Water to consider both the supply and demand side of the water balance equation.

The Alliance appreciates the need for Hunter Water to begin the approval process for a temporary desalination plant, should, it be required if water storage levels drop to critically low levels.

However, we have concerns about the current proposal and urge Hunter Water and other entities to make every effort to encourage lower water use by both residents, and industry. We would rather that a desalination plant not be built at all.

Our concerns include, but are not limited by:

- the close proximity of the proposed plant to the Coastal Wetlands and a number of **Endangered Ecological Communities**;
- the accumulative effect of the constant adding of brine back into the ocean, together with the effects of other desalination plants across the world, including Australia;

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- the effects of dewatering 10ML of ground water during the period of construction;
- the lack of statement regarding the total of this dewatering activity, across construction and/or operation;
- the lack of statement regarding where this 10ML of ground water will ultimately go;
- increased C emissions resulting from operational aspects and the current low green energy sourcing target contemplated;
- consideration of the potential for impacts of sea level rise on the facility: this will be a big investment to have to protect from a rising ocean, and
- the potential for dune erosion and disturbance of coastal sand biome at the intake point.

We would also ask why consideration of water storage in disused mines is not a serious consideration for Hunter Water. This method of conserving water would not affect salt levels in our oceans and would provide a low or non-evaporative method of storage in appropriate 'containers'.

Further, The Alliance would like to see a more dedicated approach to the further decrease of water demand including:

- The use of greywater, including an educational campaign, with examples of grey water use, disseminated to the wider community ;
- rainwater harvesting and actions to make this more widespread;
- storm water harvesting methods;
- water recycling; and
- an increased media campaign to change water use behaviour among residents (eg shorter showers, more efficient shower heads, reduced garden watering) is critical and Hunter Water's own modelling clearly shows the positive effect of this on maintaining water storages. Along with this we request Hunter Water offers assistance to lower income customers to repair leaks etc.

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This approach would require Hunter Water to work even more closely with residents, Councils, businesses, industry and mining operations to ensure greater uptake to protect our water supply.

The Alliance would also request that the proposed plant includes an increase to the percentage of 'green power' to be used as an energy source, and that Hunter Water investigates the potential for sand contamination at the intake point, as there have been reports, for example, of asbestos dumping on beaches, including Belmont wetlands, as well as the high potential for micro plastics to taken in with seawater intake.

Yours sincerely,

Robyn Charlton BESM, Grad Cert EMS.

Chair

Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance Inc.