

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 103
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 4
Programme: Water Reform Division
Topic: MECHANISMS IN REGARDS TO WATER QUALITY
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Question Type: Spoken

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: But you have said their role in providing expert analysis and advice is absolutely critical.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: Their role and the functions they undertake in a number of areas are quite critical. A number of those functions will be continued by the government. I have said that. A number of those functions will be continued by the government, just without a stand-alone agency. Urban water provision, whether that is in cities or regional centres, is a task and responsibility of state governments and sometimes local government authorities as well. Ultimately they will be responsible for doing that, but there are a range of mechanisms in place regarding the quality of water that are quite unrelated to the operations of the National Water Commission.

Senator PRATT: Can you outline what those are.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: I can get some detail for you on notice. A lot of them relate to the health portfolio, actually.

Mr PARKER: We can provide details on notice. We have used a cooperative Commonwealth-state framework called the national water quality management system. It is an arrangement where the states and the Commonwealth are responsible for the preparation of water guidelines which set water quality standards. This covers drinking water and all sorts of other elements of water quality relating to discharges and so forth. It is then a responsibility of the state and in some cases local government authorities to implement those standards.

Answer:

1. The key documents for informing standards of urban water quality include:
 - a. The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines – maintained by the National Health and Medical Research Council under the Department of Health;
 - b. Guidelines for managing risks in recreational water – maintained by the National Health and Medical Research Council under the Department of Health;
 - c. The Australian and New Zealand Fresh and Marine Water Quality Guidelines – maintained by the Department of the Environment; and
 - d. Australian guidelines for water recycling (includes five documents) – maintained by the Department of the Environment.
2. The full list of guideline documents is available on the Department of the Environment's website: <http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/water/water-quality/national-water-quality-management-strategy>