

# SUBMISSION: INQUIRY INTO WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING POLICIES

*For ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS REFERENCES  
COMMITTEE – April 2024*



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## Introduction

Clean Ocean Foundation thanks the committee for the opportunity to submit this information and would be happy to discuss it in more detail if required.

We apologise for the brevity of this submission as we only recently became aware of it. There is much more we can contribute to this inquiry and would be happy to expand on some of the issues canvassed if so asked either in person or by further documentation.

*The views and comments expressed in this submission are Clean Ocean Foundation's alone, and in no way should be interpreted as those of any other body.*

### *Who is Clean Ocean Foundation?*

Clean Ocean Foundation (COF) is a community based environmental charity seeking to stop all forms of ocean and river pollution.

### *What do we know?*

Our body of knowledge has been gained through both collaborative and independent research. Over the past two decades, we have been recognised as honest brokers supporting communities with concerns related the water sector.

COF has also learnt much since it began producing the National Outfall Database (NOD) in 2015. The NOD is an initiative for the National Environment Science Project (NESP)<sup>ii</sup> which assists decision makers and the wider community to understand the issues related to the impact of outfall discharges on the marine environment and recreational users.

COF believes that Australia cannot afford to make costly decisions about waste management and our nation's water infrastructure, without consideration of how its waste products enter and impact on Australia's waterways and coastlines.

Further, with the EU's recent commitment to Zero Pollution from urban waste water discharges including micropollutants and nutrients underlines the fact that Australia's approach to aquatic pollution from its WWTPs is now outdated and unacceptable.

COF believes it critical that Australia adopt a similar Zero Pollution framework to not only align with a major export market, but to also drive water reform in Australia in a direction capable of yielding significant economic and environmental benefits not possible within the existing system. This must also include an evidenced based approach to water recycling that also embraces purified recycle water (PRW).

COF understands that a national approach to water recycling that also embraces purified recycle water (PRW) can yield significant benefits both economically and environmentally, including significant reductions in aquatic pollution of Australia's waterways and coastlines.

**COFs recent work on community sentiment is evidenced towards wate water treatment and ocean pollution is clearly shown by:**

1/ Our Petition (over 16,000 signatures) calling for action to modify Victoria's water policy to allow use of recycled water (and reduce ocean pollution).

2/ Our Petition (almost 10,000 signatures) calling for a Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into pollution including micropollutants and microplastics from Australia's 192 outfalls.

3/ Our Open Letter to Minister Plibersek (due for public release April 24).

**See timeline below for links.**

### *What do we want?*

Our Clean Water Clean Ocean policy seeks wherever possible to stop the contribution that discharges from waste water treatment plants make to the pollution of this nation's ocean and waterways. It recommends a 3-point plan is designed to maximise water recycling and minimise aquatic pollution by embracing a circular economy approach to water policy.

- 1. National Zero Pollution targets.**
- 2. National water recycling targets.**
- 3. Polluter pays principle for industrial emitters.**

### *Issues*

#### **Zero Pollution Targets EU Summary <sup>iii</sup>**

Tertiary (removal of nitrogen and phosphorus by 2039)

Quaternary (a broad spectrum of micropollutants) by 2044

For Waste Water Treatments for population > 150 000 or > 10,000 if area at risk.

### *What have we done?*

Clean Ocean Foundation timeline:

2000 Clean Ocean Foundation is established as an environmental charity.

2006 After a long campaign, welcomes Victorian government's decision to upgrade Eastern Treatment Plant to discharge Class A+ advanced.

2015 - 2024 (Ongoing) Produces the National Outfall Database annually under auspices of the Federal National Environment Science Program (Marine and Coastal Hub)

2020 – Independently releases National Outfall Upgrade Strategy (NOUS 2030)

<sup>iv</sup>advocating for a national approach to waste water treatment and water recycling.

2021 – Successfully intervened (VCAT) related to proposed upgrade of Warrnambool Waste Water Treatment approvals process<sup>v</sup>

2022 – Releases national Clean Ocean Clean Water Policy<sup>vi</sup>.

2022 – Submission Federal Inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia’s oceans and waterways. <sup>vii</sup>

2022-3 – Petition Modernise Victoria’s Water Policy to allow use of recycled purified water (over 16, 000 signatures)<sup>viii</sup>

2023-4 Petition (almost 10,000 signatures) calling for a Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into pollution including micropollutants and microplastics from Australia’s 192 outfalls<sup>ix</sup>

2024 – Our open letter to Minister Plibersek related to the use of recycled water and its impact on ocean pollution. Due for release Apr 2024<sup>x</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://nod.org.au/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.nespmarinecoastal.edu.au/project/2-4/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7108-2024-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.cleanocean.org/nous-2030.html>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.standard.net.au/story/7478574/fight-to-overturn-epa-sewage-ruling/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.cleanocean.org/cocw-national.html>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=268ea020-2d1a-4579-ab11-3fbdbeca0536&subId=730006>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://chng.it/Qtb7NggryZ>

<sup>ix</sup> <https://chng.it/Drp4Kq6Lpk>

<sup>x</sup> <https://www.cleanocean.org/open-letter-to-minister.html>