

Open Letter to The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP

An urgent call for leadership on water recycling

Dear Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP,

We, a diverse coalition of academics, experts, and concerned citizens, implore you to take a bold leadership stance on water recycling in Australia. The challenges posed by ecosystems decline, climate change and population growth necessitate immediate and sustained action to ensure water sustainability in both urban and regional areas.

Over the past two decades, Australia's water recycling investment has lagged far behind global standards. It is time to acknowledge the urgent need for comprehensive reforms. Waiting for the next crisis is not an option. We must prepare for the future of water recycling now.

Currently, Australia's water sector faces constraints that hinder its ability to embrace purified recycled water (PRW) as a vital component of a scientifically sound water sustainability strategy. These constraints stem from baseless concerns and the "yuck factor," rather than evidence-based decision-making.

We find it disheartening that Australia, known for embracing science and innovation, hesitates to adopt PRW, despite its successful integration into Perth's water supply since 2018. Failure to do so denies our nation significant economic and environmental benefits that PRW offers over desalination in some circumstances, the only other source of manufactured water.

These benefits encompass substantial reductions in aquatic pollution, energy consumption, water wastage, and billions of dollars in potential savings nationwide. Therefore, we urgently request your support in the following areas:

1. Appoint an eminent person as the **Ambassador for Water Recycling** to champion and promote PRW within Australia.
2. Establish a **working group** to address institutional bias favouring desalination over PRW at the federal level.
3. Update the **Australian Drinking Water Guidelines** related to PRW, with a focus on water quality rather than the need for an environmental buffer.
4. Create an **education group** dedicated to raising public awareness about PRW and improving water literacy.
5. Ensure that the new Federal EPA adopts **emission targets** for all outfalls in line with those adopted by the EU by 2035.
6. Collaborate with the states to establish **water recycling targets** that promote best practices in infrastructure management.
7. Implement a **cap on all pollutant discharges** for existing outfalls and prohibit any new ocean or estuarine outfalls.

Hon. Tanya Plibersek, the time for action is now. We urge you to seize this opportunity to propel Australia towards a sustainable water future. Let us not allow another 20 years to pass with little progress on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Organization/Title, if applicable]