

16 November 2017

Water NSW Interim report by the NSW Ombudsmen

The NSW Ombudsman Interim Report on Water Compliance and Enforcement was handed down yesterday. A key aspect of what the Ombudsman has been looking into, and will continue to look into, is:

*“Whether the water compliance and enforcement function has been properly understood, **supported and resourced within Government**; and whether the **function has suffered** rather than benefitted **from a frequent history of administrative restructuring.**”*

This suggests the ongoing intervention into DPI Water, State Water Corporation and other water regulators as well as the persistent restructuring that changes in management seems to bring, is one key aspect of the problems with water compliance and enforcement.

CPSU NSW members have reported that compliance-related functions have been removed, and replaced and removed again over the years. That, with new upper and middle management changes that occur on a semi-regular basis, means changes are inevitable and these changes do not always bring about better outcomes in relation to compliance and enforcement.

The forced transfer last year of employees and related functions from DPI to Water NSW was a rushed move the union does not consider was well thought out. It has resulted in ongoing major changes to personnel directly related to water regulation and compliance.

CPSU NSW members are dedicated to their work, dedicated to ensuring the highest level of integrity and compliance in our activities in supporting the

people of NSW. The mismanagement of agencies, departments and years and years' worth of budget cuts, 'efficiency dividends' and rolling restructures have taken their toll.

You can read the media release [HERE](#) and the full report [HERE](#).

The NSW Ombudsman reports that:

“Over the past two decades the administration of functions related to water management and regulation have been restructured and moved between different government agencies close to twenty times. At least eight of those changes in the last fifteen years were major restructures that resulted in substantial staff relocations and retrenchments, carving up of functions, splitting of departments, amalgamation of units and establishment of new agencies. Since 2003 when the Department of Land and Water Conservation was abolished, there has been a restructure involving water management functions approximately every two years.

*The opinion of the Ombudsman's office is that the impact of these changes on staff, loss of expertise and corporate knowledge, disruptions to systems and strategy, and continuity of service delivery, have been **devastating.**”*

The report also notes there was significant and consistent under-spend on compliance activities of about \$1.9 million per year (less than 30 per cent of the budget) over the period 2012-2016, even after the Ombudsman had repeatedly indicated they were under-resourced. There was also a substantial drop in compliance activity following the Transformation to WaterNSW.

