

December 2024

To Department. of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Re: *Draft NSW Recycled Water Roadmap*

The Committee for Sydney welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the draft NSW Recycled Water Roadmap, released by the NSW Government for comment in October 2024.

We commend the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water for undertaking this draft Roadmap. The Committee believes that recycled water, for both potable and non-potable use, is an essential part of Sydney's growth strategy as we grow in a time of increased climate variability. Increasing the resilience of critical infrastructure such as water to safeguard against the ongoing risk of drought is essential and recycled water is a vital part of this increase in resilience. We also appreciate and applaud the clarity of this draft Roadmap.

The Committee for Sydney is an urban policy think tank. We are advocates for the whole of Sydney, focused on developing solutions to the most important problems we face. We are proud to have over 160 members that represent key business, academic and civic organisations across Sydney.

In 2021, the Committee for Sydney initiated a specific program of research on climate change, equity and urban climate adaptation across. We have worked in collaboration with industry, academia, utilities, financial service providers and all levels of government to develop research to inform our advocacy, including around critical infrastructure resilience.

The Committee fully endorses the focus of the NSW Government on increasing recycled water in the mix of water sources. We cannot grow our population and mitigate the risks of climate change-induced natural disasters – including drought and extreme heat – through reliance on rainfall dependent dam-sourced water and modest amounts of desalinated water alone.

Our interest in purified recycled water creating additional capacity also enables flexibility to address growing flood risk in the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley. the opportunity to lower the holding capacity of Warragamba to provide a degree of flood mitigation can be enabled by creating alternate rainfall independent supply options like purified recycled water. This is a potential co-benefit for recycled water that could be used to promote the benefits of the technology, in addition to improving the resilience of Greater Sydney's Water supply. The Committee for Sydney's report [Lowering Warragamba Dam is only the first step towards Sydney's climate resilience](#) sets out this case and recommends:

- 1. Accelerate investment in additional drinking water security
- 2. Treat our wastewater closer to where it is created
- 3. Implement immediate and long-term flood risk mitigation measures

In addition to our endorsement, the Committee offers our platform as an independent think tank and convenor of events to DCCCEW if we can help raise awareness, or be a forum for information exchange as this Roadmap is rolled out. We recognise that while this inclusion of recycled water is essential, it is also a contentious and potentially divisive issue in certain parts of the community.

With this support, the Committee also offers several suggestions for further consideration in the final roadmap.

- **Reinforce the increased need for recycled water to keep our living infrastructure alive** – in addition to increased demand for water to grow and maintain our much needed tree canopy, the more moisture trees, shrubs and grass can absorb, the more effective role they can play in cooling our suburbs and cities. Our report [Nature Positive Sydney – Valuing Sydney's living infrastructure](#) included recommendations to “Manage living infrastructure as an asset”, an approach that would put green infrastructure on the balance sheet of State and Local Government, and in turn put an increased value on the need to keep those assets healthy.
- **Reflect the impact of data centres and industry growth** – the draft Roadmap makes general reference to industries – however the growing demand for data centres will mean significant increase in demand for water – and the focus on industry development particularly in Western Sydney will increase demand also. The roadmap could have more specific focus on this aspect of demand – and potentially opportunities for the co-location of water purification infrastructure with high consumption industries
- **We support the recognition of the need to align water infrastructure with planning** and additionally suggest that this also expands to economic development and industry policy so that recycled water is part of future economic infrastructure planning. The Committee recently released a report [Transforming Sydney's Economy](#) that includes a recommendation on the need for cross-sectoral metropolitan planning (recommendation 5) that may help to frame this in the roadmap.
- **Consider how recycled water can help reduce critical infrastructure interdependency risks** – the increasing risks to Sydney's existing water supply – due to drought and storm – are another strong reason why increasing redundancy and capacity are built into the planning of Greater Sydney's water supply and the role played by recycled water infrastructure. This means also considering the resilience of the energy supply needed to enable water recycling to occur under extreme weather conditions. The Committee released a report in 2024 – [No Weak Links](#) – that has more detailed recommendations on this issue.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide further feedback. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, we are more than happy to do so.

Kind regards,



Jeremy Gill
Head of Policy
The Committee for Sydney



Sam Kernaghan
Director of Resilience Program
The Committee for Sydney