

Drinking Water Regulatory Section Newsletter

Volume 6, December, 2006

The Drinking Water Regulatory Section would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas, and a very successful New Year. Once again, it has been a busy and productive year and we have valued the collaborative nature of our work with the drinking water sector and our other stakeholders. The challenges facing the water sector such as the current drought, on-going uncertainty about the long-term effects of climate change and of course the current bush-fires will make 2007 an even more challenging year. We look forward to our continuing work with you all, and will endeavour to provide support as you face the challenges of providing an on-going supply of safe drinking water to Victoria.

News From the Section

One of the major changes during 2006 was the restructure within DHS that resulted in the Drinking Water Regulatory Unit co-locating with the Water Policy Unit – and the very minor name change to the Drinking Water Regulatory Section. The change has been a productive one from the Sections point of view – there has been value in working beside the arm of DHS that oversees water issues such as re-cycling, fluoridation, blue-green algae and other non-drinking water matters. It is hoped that these benefits have been apparent to the water sector as well.

Another benefit for the Drinking Water Regulatory Section from the restructure has been our new Assistant Director, Environmental Health - Jan Bowman. Jan has extensive experience with the water industry, and needs no introduction to many of you.

We have had several staff changes. Janine Ryan is currently on maternity leave for most of 2006, and will return to work in January 2007. Vanora Mulvenna has gone on a 12-month secondment to work with the Water Policy Section, and will continue to work with many of you on re-cycling, blue-green algae and other matters.

The Section and water businesses have been through a period of hectic activity in relation to the *Safe Drinking Water Act 2003* and the *Safe Drinking Water Regulations 2005*. Some of the major accomplishments are listed below.

- There has been an enormous body of work undertaken to identify the water sampling localities and the water sampling points across the state. Although it was an onerous task, a number of water businesses have commented on the value derived from developing a better understanding of their water supply systems, the maps and GIS layers that were developed as part of the process, as well as the opportunity to audit and confirm their water sampling points.
- Businesses continue the on-going review of supplies that may not comply with the Legislative water quality standards or may not be intended for drinking. In consultation with the Section, businesses are making decisions on these supplies, such as supply improvements that will bring the water into compliance, applying for undertakings or contemplating the supply as regulated water. As a result, a number of supplies that did not comply with the standards in the previous financial year are now undergoing improvement works, with undertakings in place on many supplies.
- The monthly results continue to arrive, albeit in a new format. We would like to remind all water businesses that the collection of weekly water quality monitoring samples for *E. coli* and turbidity must continue over the Christmas/New Year period for you to remain compliant with regulations 11, 12 and 13.

Please continue to consult with your designated liaison officer if you require assistance with any of these issues, or any other matters related to water quality or the legislation.

The Section has sent out a number of communications during the year – including those listed below. Please contact your liaison officer if you have not seen them. Guidance notes and reporting documents are available at the drinking water website at

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/water/drinking.htm>.

- Guidance Note 7 – Notifications under the *Safe Drinking Water Act* 2003 (Sections 18, 22), and associated form “Reporting known or suspected contamination of drinking water or the supply of non-complying water”

The original reporting form required some amendments, and has recently been updated to allow six sets of analytical results to be reported on one form. This improved version is now on the drinking water website.

- Guidance Note 8 – “Applying for a variation to frequency at which samples of drinking water are collected” and associated application form.
- Guidance on the water quality component of the ESC Water Plans
- Data submission guidelines for monthly water quality data – a requirement to allow data upload on the Section’s new database.

Coming soon

- Guidelines for risk management plan audits
- DHS auditor approval process
- RABSQA Drinking Water QMS Auditor Certification
- Industry guide to Supply-by-agreement (developed collaboratively with VicWater)

Other items of interest

AQUALITY – the WSAA Continuous Improvement Tool

The Section provided input into the development of the WSAA “Aquality” continuous improvement tool.

The tool, launched by WSAA in early December, provides an assessment process for the systematic evaluation of the implementation of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG) – Framework for the Management of Drinking Water Quality. WSAA, in collaboration with the drinking water sector and consultants have developed some 200 Measures that have been carefully constructed to probe each of the ADWG Elements in sufficient detail to provide confidence that appropriate good management practices are in place to protect drinking water quality.

Water businesses can use Aquality as a self-assessment tool, or they can use the results to bench-mark against other comparable utilities.

The Drinking Water Regulatory Section has reviewed and assessed all elements and the tool includes cross-reference to the requirements and sections of the *Safe Drinking Water Act* 2003 and the *Safe Drinking Water Regulations* 2005. This feature of Aquality ensures that the tool will be a useful adjunct should a water business and their chosen auditor want to use it in the course of their risk management plan audit.

A comprehensive paper can be found in the November issue of the WSAA Journal (Donlon P, Davison A and Deere D: *Sleeping Well at Night*, *WSAA Journal*, Issue 6, November 2006).

For further information and details on accessing *Aquality*, please contact Peter Donlon at WSAA on peter.donlon@wsaa.asn.au or phone 03 96060678

Australian Drinking Water Guidelines – Chapter 8 “Drinking Water Chemicals”

The National Health & Medical Research Council has released chapter 8 of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. The Guidelines include the advice that “*If a chemical not listed in this chapter is to be used in the treatment of drinking water, it is the responsibility of the water authority to seek advice from the*

appropriate state/territory health regulatory agency, and take into consideration health, environmental, and occupational health and safety issues."

Each query submitted to the Section will be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, for queries on the use of chemicals in water destined for drinking or publicly accessible recreational use, the Regulatory Section would advise the water authority to carry out a suitable risk assessment, and determine if there are residues or by-products generated that were of public health consequence that would prevent the business from complying with regulation 6(1)(e). In accordance with regulation 15(1)(i) the use of all chemicals must be disclosed in the annual report to the Department.

The Chapter can be found at the following link, and is also attached to the accompanying e-mail. Please note that the contact number for the Department has now been changed to 1300 761 874. Alternately you can call your business liaison officer directly.

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/files/adwg_11_06_chapter_8.pdf

Water – Make it Safe

The DHS Better Health Channel, in collaboration with Parks Victoria, have produced some information for people who walk or camp in areas without access to safe drinking water. Many wilderness and Parks Victoria sites do not have access to treated water, and they are now signed as "Not suitable for drinking". This information appears on the DHS Better Health Channel, and has been developed as a Parks Victoria Fact Park Note (attached to accompanying e-mail).

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Water_make_it_safe_to_drink?open

Blue-Green Algae

The current climatic conditions and low water storage levels will require vigilant risk management around blue-green algae.

The CRC for Water Quality and Treatment have recently completed the national tour of the Cyanobacterial Roadshow. The Melbourne leg was very well attended by members of the Victorian drinking water sector and stakeholders, and provided an excellent overview of the current state of knowledge about blue-green algae, their toxins and how to detect, reduce and manage them.

The fact sheets contained in the publication "Cyanobacteria: Management and Implications for Water Quality" provide water operators with information that will assist them in the management of their water supplies in relation to cyanobacteria. They cover issues from catchment to tap, and include guidelines for sampling and acceptable toxin levels, management advice and detection methods.

The fact sheets can be found at

http://www.waterquality.crc.org.au/dwfacts/techfact_cyanobacteria.pdf

The recreational guidelines and issues were sourced from the NH&MRC publication

"Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water" available at

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/eh38.htm>

The CRC website also has numerous publications on the management, health risks and identification of cyanobacteria.

<http://www.waterquality.crc.org.au/>

DSE and DHS recently undertook a review of the annual statewide circular "BGA Co-ordination and related matters", which details co-ordination arrangements and reporting requirements for water suppliers and water storage managers in Victoria. The updated circular has been distributed to all water authorities and councils.

For the first time, the updated 2006-2007 circular specifies health based alert levels for blue-green algae in both drinking water and recreational water. These alert levels have been derived from the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines* (NHMRC 2004), the *National Protocol for the Monitoring of Cyanobacteria and their Toxins in Surface Fresh Waters, Draft* (NRMMC 2003 – in review), and the *Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water* (NHMRC 2005).

The new circular requires water authorities to notify DHS when blue-green algae levels reach Alert Level 3 in drinking water supplies, as per the reporting requirements established under Section 22 of the *Safe Drinking Water Act 2003*.

Risk Management Plan Audit

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken to facilitate the process for the risk management plan audits that are required by the *Safe Drinking Water Act 2003*. Key components will be communicated when they are finalised and include:

- Development of a Drinking Water QMS Auditor Certification Scheme by RABSQA that required:
 - Appointment (by RABSQA) of Drinking Water QMS skill examiners
 - Development of an examination to assess knowledge of chapters 2 and 3 of the ADWG
 - Negotiations to identify an appropriate Registered Training Organisation
- Development of a Guidance note for potential auditors and water authorities on the audit process
- Development of the DHS auditor approval process

The development of the certification scheme is nearing completion, and in summary requires applicants to demonstrate:

- Knowledge requirements assessed by examination
- Education and work experience requirements confirmed by:
 - evidence of a relevant degree or diploma in engineering, science or medicine
 - evidence of 7 years work experience in two of three areas – water industry, management systems or auditing
- Appropriate personal attributes examined by standard RABSQA psychometric testing
- Skill competency demonstrated through observational examination by RABSQA skill examiners

Seminar Program

In August 2006 approximately 60 people attended a DHS seminar that explored some of the issues related to drinking water quality and catchment management. The program included a short presentation from Jan Bowman, Assistant Director of Environmental Health followed by three speakers with interests in water quality, catchment management and public health.

Geoff Hocking, CEO, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority
 Rob Considine, Senior Strategic Planner, Melbourne Water
 Bob Ford, Manager Catchment Policy, Central Highlands Water

All presentations are available on the drinking water website at
<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/water/d-seminars.htm>

The seminar provided some insight into the complexity of the relationship between the major stakeholders, and highlighted some areas for DHS, other Government agencies, the water authorities and the Catchment Management Authorities to pursue to improve the impact that many of our catchments have on drinking water quality.

Catchment Management

One of the outcomes from the seminar was an undertaking by the Drinking Water Regulatory Section to follow-up on some issues raised at the seminar with the Department of Sustainability and Environment. DHS and DSE met in November to discuss a number of these issues and also discussed some options for ensuring all parties that are involved in public health and catchment management have a forum for discussion of issues of concern and information sharing.

Some of the issues discussed at the meeting included:

- Status of the 2000 "Interim Guidelines for Planning Applications in Open, Potable Water Supply Catchment Areas". The advice received from DSE is that these guidelines are current, and there is currently no intention to review them. The Guidelines can be found at
[http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/2B621C537A272364CA25700600224716/\\$File/potable+water.pdf](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/2B621C537A272364CA25700600224716/$File/potable+water.pdf)

- Water authorities can have little or no warning of developments in their catchments that have been granted a planning permit by local government that might pose a significant risk to drinking water quality. Having the water authority recognised as a referral agency for local government planning approvals would result in all planning permit applications to council in drinking water catchments being referred to the water authority.
- The need for a review of water catchment issues – changing climate conditions and present drought have made it more important for effective catchment management
- Declaration of a special water supply catchment area under the “special area” provision of the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994. The process:
 - Benefits the water authority, but requires significant action by the Catchment Management Authority (CMA);
 - Is made by the Minister on the recommendation of the CMA. The CMA must make a recommendation to the Minister;
 - Requires forward planning, cannot overturn existing land uses and requires a Land Use Determination and
 - Requires the CMA to develop a ‘Special Area Plan’
- Special Area Plans require considerable work including a consultation process, land use determination, identification of targets and measures, identification and allocation of costs

Issues for further discussion:

- Can the water industry develop a set of standard agreements and responses that can be used provided in their role as a referral agency for planning processes;
- Getting public health issues onto the agenda of the CMAs;
- Identifying the current barriers for CMAs in recommending that areas be declared as special water supply catchment areas and
- Facilitating an improved relationship between CMAs and water authorities that would enhance processes such as ‘special area declarations’

Future activities discussed included:

- Formation of a multi-agency working group to deal with catchment management issues in a systematic way across the State
- Development of a brochure for land holders and people living in a catchment Seminar/workshop for all stakeholders

Contacting the Drinking Water Regulatory Unit

Contact or Correspondence Type	Name/Position	Address/Telephone	E-mail
Formal correspondence	Jan Bowman Assistant Director, Environmental Health	Public Health Group GPO Box 4057 Melbourne 3001	
General queries	Unit e-mail		dwr@dhhs.vic.gov.au
Monthly water quality results	Unit e-mail		dwr@dhhs.vic.gov.au
Incident reports - Section 22 (Business hours)	Telephone - you will be directed to your Business Liaison Officer or available EHU staff member E-mail DHS Form	1300 761 874	water@dhhs.vic.gov.au
Incident reports - Section 22 (Out of hours or no response)	EHU Emergency Pager Please inform operators that you have an incident with your drinking water under the Safe Drinking Water Act, give your name and organisation and you will be connected to a Senior EHU Officer E-mail DHS form	1300 790 733	water@dhhs.vic.gov.au
Section 18 Notifications	E-mail		water@dhhs.vic.gov.au
Queries relating to your business, the Legislation and the Regulations	Contact Business Liaison Officer David Sheehan Julie Hoy Brian Labza Janine Ryan	9096 5647 9096 5105 9096 5088 9096 5720	david.sheehan@dhhs.vic.gov.au julie.hoy@dhhs.vic.gov.au brian.labza@dhhs.vic.gov.au janine.ryan@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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