



13 May 2024

The Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC
Minister for the Environment
52 Martin Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister

Re: Councils position on changes to NSW Beachwatch Program

Thank you for your response to SCCG's concern's regarding changes to the NSW Government's Beachwatch program (letter dated 3 May 2024). Although our specific issues were not addressed in your response, we welcome the extension of the NSW Beachwatch program until 1 July 2025. We also believe that the additional 12 month consultation period will be of benefit to your agency as it will allow for detailed consultation with Sydney Water to occur as this was not done prior.

We would also like to reiterate that the 12 month extension is unlikely to change our member Councils' positions. The SCCG and its members continue to believe that the NSW Beachwatch program should remain a fully funded state program as explained as follows.

1 Councils do not have a legal responsibility for water quality monitoring unlike Sydney Water

As discussed with your senior advisor, Mr Matt Floro, on 15 April and detailed in our letter to you of 8 March, there is no legal obligation for councils to monitor the quality of receiving waterways below mean high water for public health purposes. This has been confirmed by the Office of Local Government and SCCG's own independent legal advice.

Sydney Water does not contribute to the Beachwatch program except for the Illawarra beaches¹. Yet, poor beachwatch ratings are attributed to sewerage which is a responsibility of Sydney Water and the program's data is integral to Sydney Water's monitoring and abatement programs.

According to Sydney Water's [Annual Environmental Performance Report 2022-23](#), it utilises Beachwatch data to assess the impact of sewage overflows on swimmability and to prioritise work to reduce overflows. The [Sydney Water Aquatic Monitoring \(SWAM\) Program](#) also identifies that the results from the Beachwatch program are made available to Sydney Water for assessment of potential dry weather wastewater leakage issues.

I understand that, following our recommendation to you in March 2024 to duly consider Sydney Water's role in Beachwatch monitoring, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water has reached out to Sydney Water. The additional consultation period you have provided will hopefully facilitate in-depth discussions with Sydney Water on the potential for them to financially contribute to Beachwatch. We look forward to hearing the outcome of those discussions.

¹ Sydney Water (2023) *Sydney Water Aquatic Monitoring Program*, page 69
Attachment 8

2 Our Councils are unwilling to contribute to the Program

During our meeting, Mr Floro asked if our member councils had any capacity at all to financially contribute to the NSW Beachwatch program. In response, we canvassed the willingness of our councils to financially contribute to Beachwatch at our regular General Managers forum meeting on 9 May 2024. Our councils' position remains unchanged from what we presented to Mr Floro and which is summarised in the table below:

Council	Status
Bayside Council	is unlikely to pay
Inner West Council	is awaiting further information
North Sydney Council	will not be paying
Northern Beaches Council	will not be paying
Randwick City Council	is unlikely to pay
Sutherland Shire Council	will not be paying
Waverley Council	is unlikely to pay
Willoughby City Council	is unlikely to pay
Woollahra Municipal Council	is unlikely to pay

3 Councils' role in stormwater management and its relationship with Beachwatch

Mr Floro queried how stormwater and stormwater management was related to Beachwatch.

Regarding stormwater, our councils acknowledge that stormwater runoff can have a deleterious environmental impact on receiving waterways. Councils also have primary responsibility for managing stormwater and as such have undertaken considerable work over many decades to improve the quality of stormwater runoff and protect local waterways.

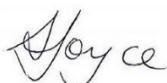
4 Outstanding request for a copy of 2021 Independent Assurance Review

Mr Floro also committed to looking into providing the SCCG with a copy of the 2021 independent assurance review that we requested in our previous letter. We understand that this review was used as a basis for seeking contributions from Sydney councils.

Finally, we trust the extension of the Beachwatch program will give you the time to respond to our specific concerns raised in our previous letter and to find alternative funding sources. Ultimately, however, we affirm our position that the NSW Beachwatch program remain a state responsibility that should continue to be state-funded.

If you have any future questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at executiveofficer@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Joyce
SCCG Executive Officer