

SUBMISSION REGARDING THE FLUSHING OF THE PATTERSON LAKES “QUITE LAKES”

03-Feb-2017

I make this submission on behalf of the owners / occupants of the (74) seventy four residences that comprise the Illawong Club and retirement village.

1. Background

The so called “Quite Lakes” were originally installed by the developer as part of the drainage system for the Patterson Lakes area. They were intended to be a type of overflow system for the harbour / river system when the lock gates were closed.

As far as I can determined the lakes never actually operated in this mode. However, they nominally remain part of area drainage system and as such they are Melbourne Water’s responsibility.

At some point the developer decided that the “Quite Lakes” could be utilized as a selling point. The developer then proceeded to install a pumped lake flushing system, sand beaches, some beautification and implemented a maintenance system.

The developer then handed the system to the relevant water / drainage authority. After a somewhat convoluted history the lakes became MW responsibility.

It was before I was resident but I understand Melbourne Water operated a regime where the lakes were flushed by pumping in water, the beaches were regularly raked and cleaned and as required the beach sand was dredged from the lake returned to the beaches.

Melbourne Water was paid for this service by a special water rate (precip? rate). The rate was applied to the resident around the lakes and the residents along the canals.

At some point MW decided they were not recovering sufficient money from this rate to cover the costs involved particularly those related to the maintenance of the canals. MW then proposed to steeply increase the applicable rate. This led to multiple protests.

The question then was raised to whether maintenance of the lakes was part of the normal drainage system for which Melbourne Water was funded in the normal rates. If the lakes were part of the drainage system Melbourne Water were not entitled to make a separate charge for their maintenance.

The protests led to the inquiry which the commission has the report from and will no doubt receive detail comments on in other submissions.

My interest in the inquiry is the effect that the recommendations have on the residents I represent. They are suddenly faced with a bureaucratic nightmare were (3) three feuding authorities, whom all want funding, have replaced the previous single authority Not only are the various authorities arguing among themselves but lake maintenance is not happening:

- Melbourne Water is very reluctantly flushing the lake, despite the report apparently ruling that the lake had to be maintained at least second class water standard and are demanding payment for what they do
- Melbourne Water are now not regularly testing and publishing the water quality; leaving the residents concerned as whether children should play and swim in the lakes
- Kingston Council are maintaining the beaches on a much reduced schedule
- Parks Victoria are not recovering the sand from the lake claiming they do not have the funding to do this

The submission below considers the impact of the proposed Melbourne Water charge on the residents in the context of the above matters

2. Impact on the residents

The majority of the occupants have restricted income; some are totally dependent on the age pension. Whilst the proposed figure of \$150 p.a. may be acceptable / insignificant to majority of the general population it is significant if your income is constrained.

Also this charge is not guaranteed to rise significantly in the future.

In addition to the charge Melbourne Water wish to impose other bodies are also indicating that they want to impose new charges. Viz:

Kingston Council wants to implement a charge of approximately \$200? p.a. to rake and maintain the sand beaches around the lakes.

Parks Victoria wants someone to pay them to recover the sand from lakes and return it to the beaches. (The beaches around Lake Illawong are currently devoid of sand.)

If all these proposed charges are allowed to be implemented, with no limits on escalation, the residents of the Club / village could shortly be facing charges of \$1,000 p.a. This sum would be beyond the capacity of some of the residents to pay.

If the Essential Services Commission believes that some charge for pumping water into the lakes is justified then I (we) would suggest that it be implemented on the same valuation basis as the council / water rates are charged.

It has been previously indicated that Melbourne Water does not have the power to impose differential charges. If this is true the commission might wish to investigate whether Melbourne Water can have this ability.

3. The Melbourne Water Charge

Melbourne Water has decided to impose this charge of \$150 p.a. with no supporting information. I have previously attempted to obtain the technical and costs basis for this but have totally unsuccessful.

Before the commission makes a ruling Melbourne Water should supply to all interested parties at least the following information:

- The type of pump. (I have been told it is a multi stage Grunfos but this has not be confirmed)
- The actual pumping volume in m³ per hour
- The combined hydraulic and static head the pump is facing when pumping at this rate (kPa)
- The combined pump and motor efficiency when operating under these condition
- The variable cost of power being charged. (This should be low as they generate their own power using the methane off gases from their sewerage digestors)
- The annual maintenance budget and the basis for this budget
- The depreciation / capital recovery charge
- The fixed / Administrrative costs being imposed.

If this information is supplied interested parties will be able to reach their own conclusion as to the fairness of the proposed charge.