



MEDIA RELEASE

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THE UNDERWATER SECRET TO NEWCASTLE'S PRISTINE BEACHES

With summer just around the corner, Hunter Water's divers have inspected a critical piece of local infrastructure that was built 30 years ago and lies hidden beneath the ocean.

The Burwood Beach ocean outfall sits 25 metres below the sea and extends 1.8 kilometres out from the shoreline, ensuring treated sewage is kept far away from swimmers and surfers.

Hunter Water decided to overhaul local beach water quality with an upgrade to Burwood Wastewater Treatment Works in 1984, and in 1986 started boring the 2.5 metre diameter tunnel through sandstone beneath the ocean floor for a new outfall, an undertaking worth the equivalent of \$66 million today.

Before the ocean outfall was built, local beachgoers were always on the lookout for plumes spreading north from Burwood Beach, where Newcastle's sewage was discharged from a 20 metre pipe after being screened for solids. Today, the ocean outfall ensures that after going through several stages of treatment, effluent from more than 190,000 people living in parts of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie is dispersed into the ocean in a way that does not affect swimmers and surfers or the marine environment.

Hunter Water Managing Director Jim Bentley said the deep ocean outfall and upgrades to Burwood Wastewater Treatment Works were largely to thank for local beaches today being among the cleanest in NSW.

"Constructing the ocean outfall was a bold project that involved months of boring, digging and blasting through sandstone deep beneath the ocean floor in order to change Newcastle's beaches forever, helping them become the tourist attraction they are today.

"Maintenance checks like today's ensure that with thousands of swimmers and surfers descending on Hunter beaches, the outfall is working as it was designed to 30 years ago.

"With holidays fast approaching and everyone hitting the beach, it's hard to imagine that as recently as the late 1980s locals had to check for signs of sewage before taking a dip.

"Thanks to the ocean outfall, the days of swimmers checking for grease on the sand or brown plumes in the breakers have been replaced by those where our local beaches consistently receive top marks from the NSW Government's Beachwatch program," he said.

Surfest organiser Warren Smith said the annual surfing event wouldn't be the success it is today if it were not for the water quality of Newcastle's beaches.

"I've surfed locally for decades and back in the 70s and 80s sewage from Burwood was just something we put up with. The difference between then and now is astonishing, and if it were not for the outfall and the clean beaches, we wouldn't be able to host surfers from around the world at Surfest.

"I'm proud that every year I have surfers from places like the USA and South Africa commenting on how clean are beaches are and how important that is to the competitors at Surfest," he said.

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