



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## HUNTER WATER TAKES OUT 'INSURANCE POLICY' FOR UNPRECEDENTED DROUGHT

Hunter Water is obtaining planning approvals for a temporary desalination plant as an 'on the shelf' insurance policy in case an unprecedented drought were to hit the region.

Temporary desalination was included in the NSW Government's Lower Hunter Water Plan as the last resort in a suite of drought responses for the Hunter, supplying 15 million litres of water per day to ease pressure on local dams. The plant would be constructed on Hunter Water land at Belmont if water storages dropped to 35 percent, as a result of the region experiencing even less rainfall than the worst drought in our history. The plant would be decommissioned when storage levels rise above 50 percent.

Hunter Water Chief Investment Officer Darren Cleary said part of being 'drought ready' under the Lower Hunter Water Plan meant having approvals in place for the worst of the worst scenarios.

"The Lower Hunter Water Plan is a 20 year water security blueprint for the Hunter which determined that while our water storages are sufficient for now, we need to be prepared for extreme drought conditions.

"Having planning approvals on the shelf and ready to go for a temporary desalination plant is an insurance policy in the event a catastrophic drought hit the Hunter. Actually building the plant would follow every other possible water saving measure, including increased recycling, stormwater harvesting and stringent water restrictions.

"Although the odds of switching on the plant are in the order of 10,000 to one, we won't take the chance of running out of water because our planning approvals were not in place. Gaining approvals now means we're ready for worst," he said.

Hunter Water Managing Director Jim Bentley said the temporary desalination plant was an emergency measure rather than part of Hunter Water's long term water resource planning.

"While water demand in the Hunter went down over the last 30 years due to reduced industrial use and water wise behaviours, we're at the point with our growing population where if we keep going as we are, we'll need a new water source in 20 years' time.

"Hunter Water is working to delay the need for the next water source by saving water in our own network and with the community. We've started in our own backyard, with a dedicated leakage and water efficiency project at Hunter Water on track to save 2 billion litres of water per year through initiatives like relining reservoirs and reducing network water pressure to prevent main breaks.

"By saving water in our own system, and working in partnership with industry and the community to reduce demand, we're allowing time for new technologies to emerge which will make for a smarter, more sustainable water future."

The preliminary environmental assessment for the temporary desalination plant is currently on public exhibition at the [Department of Planning's Major Projects website](#). Hunter Water will commence consultation with the local community in early 2018.