



THE AUDIT OFFICE
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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MEDIA RELEASE

NSW Auditor-General's Report Protecting Our Rivers - Follow-up of a 2003 audit

Today, the Auditor-General of New South Wales, Peter Achterstraat, released a report on what progress has been made since a 2003 audit on protecting our rivers.

The 2003 audit examined how well the Government was protecting the quality of NSW river water and found significant gaps in how river water quality is monitored and evaluated. Arrangements for managing river water quality lacked structure and direction as there was no lead entity to coordinate the efforts of the many agencies involved.

Key Findings

“It is pleasing to note that one entity, the Natural Resources and Environment CEOs Cluster Group, now coordinates Government agency efforts to protect river health” said Peter Achterstraat. “One concern is that, while this group includes the relevant CEOs, it has no direct funding and cannot direct agency priorities.”

A target for river health has also been set—by 2015 there is an improvement in the condition of riverine ecosystems. In 2004, measuring riverine ecosystems replaced water quality and river flow measures as a better indicator of river health.

A set of indicators to measure riverine ecosystems have been agreed and a snapshot of river health for each NSW catchment is expected to be available by the end of 2008. Meaningful baseline measures of river health will not be available until 2012, and then further time will be needed to establish trends.

“The CEOs Cluster Group still needs to do further work on its strategy to address the riverine ecosystems target” said Peter Achterstraat. “To do this effectively it should conduct a formal risk assessment, something it has not done since 1997.”

The Group has developed some of the components of the strategy including a monitoring system and a strategy to address diffuse source pollution, such as agricultural run-off.

“It is still not possible to gauge in a comprehensive way the health of NSW rivers, the main risks they face and how to address them” said Peter Achterstraat.

“Monitoring the health of NSW rivers is a complex and a resource intensive process and I am encouraged by efforts to monitor river health and coordinate the many groups involved,” said Peter Achterstraat.

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