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File Number: PPH01059

4 March 2010

Update on St Helens drinking water

Dear Resident,

We'd like to give you the latest information about your town's drinking water.

At the request of the Director of Public Health, Ben Lomond Water Authority has added an extra step to the water treatment process to make sure there is no risk to public health. It involves a special carbon treatment process that removes any unknown harmful substances in the water not already removed by the normal treatment process.

This precautionary step has been funded by the Tasmanian Government, and will stay in place while water safety is further investigated. The need for it will be re-assessed as information becomes available.

There is as yet no scientific evidence to show your drinking water was unsafe for humans before we took this step. The tests shown on the *Australian Story* were on untreated water from the George River. Your drinking water is fully treated, and this will very significantly reduce any toxins or particles that might be present.

The scientists who appeared on *Australian Story* do not claim their work means the water is a health risk to people – just that it needs more investigation. The tests they did were of a very sensitive type, and how relevant those tests are to human health is not yet known.

More work is needed and Environment Protection Authority chairperson John Ramsay is setting up an independent panel of scientists to review all information and advise on the next steps. More details on this should be available next week.

In the meantime, we are trying to obtain the scientific information we need and are testing more water samples.

Some results are already available.

Tests results for known chemicals from eucalyptus trees have come back negative. These tests were done on treated and untreated water samples taken from the George River last weekend.

Another sample taken from a different river (not used for drinking water) within a native forest showed the presence of a very small amount of a eucalyptus substance. The type of test used was very sensitive, meaning it could trace tiny amounts of substances (as little as 0.2 micrograms per litre).

The test results so far do not prove that there is no problem however they are helpful.

Toxicity testing using a type of water flea is underway and as yet there are no signs of a problem.

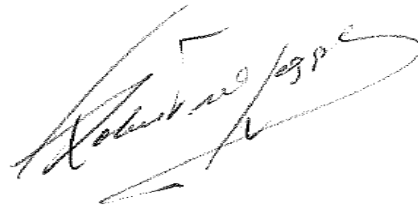
The letter we wrote to you last week mentioned the normal cancer statistics for Break O'Day for the years 2002 – 2006. The Tasmanian Cancer Registry has now examined preliminary data for 2007 and advised that there is no indication of rising cancer rates in the area.

It may take months to complete this investigation because the science is very complex. We will write to you through the Break O'Day Council to keep you informed. More information is also available on the DHHS website: www.dhhs.tas.gov.au

Your sincerely



Dr Roscoe Taylor
Director of Public Health



Robert Legge
Break O'Day Mayor



Barry Cash
Chief Executive, Ben Lomond Water