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AQUASURE HITS BACK AT DESAL CRITIC

AquaSure has hit back at an article which appeared in *The Age* this week, branding it “grossly inaccurate and irresponsible.”

AquaSure Chairman, Chloe Munro, said the author of the article, Kenneth Davidson, had drawn “absurd conclusions based on a poor grasp of the facts and dubious ‘advice’ from unnamed sources.”

Ms Munro said Mr Davidson had made a range of inaccurate and misinformed claims in his article and made no attempt to verify his information with AquaSure before going to print.

Ms Munro said that possibly the most alarming and irresponsible claim was Mr Davidson’s suggestion that ‘additional modifications’ would be needed at the plant to achieve the required boron levels.

“The Victorian Desalination Project is designed to deliver drinking water that is amongst the best in Australia and well below the limits for boron as set out in the Australian Drinking Water and World Health Organisation guidelines,” said Ms Munro.

“The plant is required to deliver water at 0.5 milligrams of boron per litre, or less. This is one eighth of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines’ requirement of up to 4 milligrams per litre, and nearly one fifth of the current World Health Organisation level of 2.4 milligrams per litre.

“Contrary to Mr Davidson’s claims, no special retrofitting, additions or modifications of any kind required to achieve this.

“Boron occurs naturally in seawater, foods and water sources all over the world.

“The reverse osmosis technology we are installing has been used successfully in desalination plants all over the world for many years to produce drinking water of the highest quality.”

Ms Munro also ruled out Mr Davidson’s suggestions that desalinated water would need to be ‘shandied’ with reservoir water to achieve the required boron levels.

“The water quality standards we’re required to meet are set in our contract with the State and they apply from the moment that the water leaves the plant,” Ms Munro explained.

“This means that desalinated water can be pumped straight into Melbourne Water’s networks if need be. There is no need for it to be ‘shandied’ with water from Cardinia Reservoir, the Thomson Dam or anywhere else.”

“Also, electronic water quality monitoring stations along the pipeline will allow the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the water authorities to monitor water quality online and in real-time at a number of different locations.

“Put simply, if we don’t meet these standards, they won’t buy the water - full stop.”

Mr Davidson’s other outrageous claim was that the pipeline that will transport water from the desalination plant to Cardinia Reservoir and other regional water networks is only capable of delivering 98GL of water, rather than the 200GL required under AquaSure’s contract.

Ms Munro confirmed this was “completely wrong.”

“To be quite clear, the marine structures, underground tunnels, pipeline and underground power supply for the project have all been designed and built to support a 200GL desalination plant,” said Ms Munro.

“This is what is required under our contract and this is what is being delivered. It makes absolutely no sense for us to build a smaller pipeline, only to have to dig it up and replace it later – at our cost - to meet our basic contractual requirements.”

Ms Munro said that while Mr Davidson’s comment that AquaSure carries the design risk is true, his ‘back of the envelope’ calculations on a number of design, construction and other elements were utterly misdirected.

“It beggars belief to suggest that the numerous organisations with professional oversight of this project could all be so wrong on such fundamental elements,” said Ms Munro.

“Mr Davidson also claimed that the project’s delivery date had been delayed from January to June 2012 and that the cost of the project had blown out to \$24 billion,” said Ms Munro.

“Our contracted date for completion of commissioning is 30 June 2012 and always has been, and we have advised repeatedly that this is a fixed price contract of \$5.7 billion net present cost, which equates to \$24 billion in nominal terms which the government released in February this year.”

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About AquaSure

AquaSure has been contracted by the Victorian Government to deliver the \$3.5 billion Victorian Desalination Project. AquaSure brings together leaders in the fields of infrastructure design, construction, and finance.