

Guilty pleas by Melbourne Water for Pollution charges

29 August 2007

Melbourne Water today pleaded guilty in the Melbourne Magistrates Court to two charges of pollution of waters. The court ordered Melbourne Water pay a total of \$150,000 towards two community environment projects following two unrelated pollution incidents one at Winneke Treatment Plant in 2005 and the other at Cardinia Treatment Plant in 2006.

EPA Executive Director Regional Services Bruce Dawson said the impact on local waterways was significant in both incidents.

“The penalties imposed by the Magistrate reflected the seriousness of these pollution charges,” Mr Dawson said.

“Melbourne Water took immediate action to report and remedy both pollution incidents. EPA Victoria advocates high standards be applied to protect local waterways and we will hold polluters to account,” he said.

EPA investigated the two pollution incidents, the first of which occurred at Winneke Treatment Plant between June 1 and December 31 in 2005 and resulted in Sugarloaf Creek turning blue. Pools of aluminium sulphate also gathered in the creek.

EPA Victoria investigated a continuous leak of aluminium sulphate entering Sugarloaf and Watsons creeks from the Water Treatment Plant, operated by Melbourne Water Corporation in Christmas Hills. The discharge occurred due to a failed joint in a delivery pipe between the aluminium sulphate loading point and the storage tanks. The leaking aluminium sulphate absorbed into the ground, and migrated to the stormwater system.

The second charge relates to a spill of fluoride that occurred at Melbourne Water’s Cardinia Potable Water Treatment plant between 1 May 2006 and 30 June 2006. A fluoride solution, used for water treatment, was discharged to Cardinia Creek after a joint in a delivery pipe corroded. At the time of the incident a stormwater valve was open, which enabled the discharge to reach Cardinia Creek. Aquatic life in the waterway was affected for at least 2 kilometres downstream of the discharge site, and was detectable several kilometres downstream.

Melbourne Water Acting Managing Director Eamonn Kelly said the organisation deeply regretted both incidents and the impact on the environment and had since taken steps to improve its approach to asset and environmental management.

“Melbourne Water takes its role in major water and sewage assets, and the environment, very seriously. Since these events Melbourne Water has undertaken an audit of our facilities, with special regard to potential environmental impacts in the event of failure. The audit will result in upgrades across various plants to ensure that such incidents are prevented in the future,” Mr Kelly said.

The court ordered Melbourne Water pay Westernport Seagrass Partnership Ltd \$90,000 for its project to control erosion in Western Port Bay and \$60,000 to the City of Whittlesea to help protect the Growling Grass Frog in Melbourne’s northern suburbs.

Magistrate O’Day found Melbourne Water without conviction and ordered them to pay EPA’s court costs of \$35,000.