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Irrelevant and Sensitive

23 May 2025

**To the Chair and Members of the Board of Inquiry**

**RE: Submission – Questions and Observations Regarding SEW Network and Bayview Road Burst**

Dear Board Members,

Please find attached my submission titled “*List of Questions and Observations – SEW Network and Bayview Road Burst and Discussion with the Municipal Building Surveyor (MBS).*” This document outlines a range of questions, concerns, and observations relating to the significant water loss incident on Bayview Road, its potential connection to the recent landslide in McCrae, and broader governance and response matters involving South East Water (SEW) and the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council (MPSC).

The submission is divided into key sections covering water loss estimation, infrastructure integrity, risk management, historical incident response, drainage observations, and operational practices. I have included specific questions that I believe warrant further examination by the Inquiry—particularly with respect to SEW’s network oversight and the shifting explanation offered by the MBS concerning the landslide’s cause.

It is my hope that this submission assists the Inquiry in better understanding the circumstances and decision-making processes related to the event, and in identifying opportunities to strengthen early detection, accountability, and inter-agency coordination.

Should the Board require any further clarification or wish to discuss any of the enclosed points, I am available and willing to contribute further.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Yours sincerely,  
**John Bolch**

**List of Questions and Observations – SEW Network and Bayview Road Burst  
 and Discussion with the Municipal Building Surveyor (MBS)**

**1. Water Loss Estimation and Network Monitoring**

- SEW has indicated, via an FOI request, that an estimated 60 ML of water was lost from their network at the Bayview Road burst.

- **Q1:** How was this volume estimated, and over what time period did this loss occur?
- **Q2:** Given SEW's tank storage system—pumping water from a lower tank at Waller Place to higher ground south of the freeway, which then supplies McCrae—how was such a significant volume of water not detected earlier?
- **Q3:** Does SEW utilize telemetry or similar monitoring systems to track water movement and flow volumes across the network? If so, why was there no alert raised regarding unusually high or frequent flows?

## **2. Network Infrastructure and Pipe Integrity**

- **Q4:** Does SEW's pumping system directly interconnect with the 150mm UPVC main that failed on Bayview Road?
- **Q5:** If so, has SEW investigated whether pressure surges or water hammer effects caused by the pumping system may have contributed to fatigue or structural failure in the 150mm UPVC pipe?

## **3. Risk Management and Policy Framework**

- **Q6:** Has SEW conducted a formal risk assessment regarding water loss within the McCrae area, considering its sensitive topography?
- **Q7:** Is a 10% water loss rate considered acceptable in this landscape, or should a lower threshold be applied due to landslip risk?
- **Q8:** Does SEW maintain a documented Risk Management Policy tailored to the McCrae region or similarly sensitive geographies?

## **4. Historical Incident Learning**

- SEW referenced a major burst at Caldermeade, with a similar volume of water loss, during BOI questioning of Ms Lara Olsen.

- **Q9:** What measures were implemented by SEW following the Caldermeade incident, and were any lessons or safeguards applied to the McCrae system?

## **5. Observations on Water Flow and Drainage**

- **Q10:** Ms Olsen stated the flow was not from trenches, based on dye testing after trench drying. Can this methodology and its findings be publicly verified?
- **Q11:** Has SEW investigated the continuous water flow into the stormwater pit on the north side of Bayview Road? If so, what conclusions were drawn?

## 6. Equipment and Operational Standards

- SEW documents refer to the use of Electrical Conductivity (EC) testing equipment.
  - **Q12:** Is this equipment calibrated annually in accordance with industry standards to ensure data accuracy?
  - **Q13:** Are SEW employees and contractors formally trained in the use of such equipment? Are training records kept, and are refresher courses required?

## 7. Structural Integrity and Causal Attribution

- A conversation took place with David Kotsiakos on 20 May 2025 regarding the structural assessment at 6 VPR. Mr. Kotsiakos stated that the issue is larger than initially thought and would require modelling over a five-week period.
  - **Observation:** For the first time, Mr. Kotsiakos stated he now believes the landslide was "most definitely water-related"—a significant shift from earlier statements.
  - **Q14:** What new evidence has led to this revised position?
  - **Q15:** Mr. Kotsiakos also suggested that overwatering a vegetable garden at 10–12 VPR was the likely cause. This appears inconsistent with the following facts:
    - Water was observed running down Penny Lane into Point Nepean Road as early as 16 December 2024.
    - The property has been unoccupied since 14 January 2025, ruling out continued irrigation.
    - Water has continued flowing from the escarpment for over 12–14 weeks post-landslide.
  - **Q16:** Has any hydrological or geotechnical modelling been undertaken to confirm or refute the plausibility of this explanation?
  - **Q17:** Has MPSC conducted risk assessments or developed risk management plans either before or after the 2022 landslip event?
  - **Q18:** Why have the evacuated residents, subject to Emergency Orders and Building Notices, not received any formal "Risk to Life" assessment after more than 20 weeks?

## Personal Observations and Comments

In my view, MPSC—and in particular the MBS—appears to have concentrated its efforts on attributing fault to the properties at 6 and 10–12 View Point Road. Initially, Mr. Kotsiakos maintained that the landslide was unrelated to water. More recently, his position has shifted, with water now cited as a primary factor.

Geotechnical investigations have been focused primarily on these properties, with minimal assessment conducted further afield. Notably, no upstream moisture testing or monitoring was conducted in the early days following the event, which I believe was a critical oversight.

Additionally, no mechanical intervention was attempted to remove excess water from the slope.

The repeated issuance of Building Notices and the tone of communications with property owners appear unduly adversarial. From my perspective, this suggests an attempt to redirect potential liability away from MPSC. This approach seems consistent with the response observed during the 2022 landslide incident.

I also note that MPSC appears to have recently engaged new legal representation to manage the ongoing Emergency Orders and Building Notices, which may indicate a shift in strategy.

**John Bolch**

23 May 2025