



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## WALKA SCHEME AMONG AUSTRALIA'S ENGINEERING BEST

The Hunter's first water supply now sits alongside engineering greats like the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Lithgow Zig Zag Railway after being recognised for national engineering heritage significance.

Engineers Australia presented Hunter Water with the accolade today at a ceremony held at The Res, which was the first drinking water reservoir built in the Hunter.

The Walka Water Supply Scheme provided Australia's first filtered water in 1885, which was drawn from the Hunter River near Maitland.

Hunter Water Interim CEO Jeremy Bath said the Walka Scheme made instant and lasting changes to the region.

"The Hunter region grew rapidly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and by the 1870s the wells and creeks that supplied the locals' water were heavily polluted, causing death from diseases like typhoid at a rate of 42 per 1000, which was three times what was considered natural for the day.

"Newcastle's port was the busiest in the country but there was still no running water, making the city a tough place to live.

"Thanks to some brilliant engineering, in 1885 the Walka Water Scheme brought fresh water from Maitland to Newcastle, supplying homes in places like Wallsend and Lambton along the way.

"The Walka Scheme brought immediate investment to the Hunter, with the largest soap factory in the southern hemisphere opening in Newcastle in 1885, and BHP choosing the city for its steelworks in 1911. Safe drinking water also improved people's health and allowed the region's population to almost double in just 12 months.

"The need to protect the public's health was the driving factor behind the Walka Scheme and 130 years later, remains Hunter Water's number one priority," he said.

Local heritage engineering expert Bill Jordan said the Walka Scheme was pioneering in a number of ways.

"The Walka Water Supply Scheme is believed to have been the first in Australia to use filtration at the source to clean the water prior to it being delivered to homes and businesses.

"Perhaps its most significant achievement was how water was protected from contamination from the source to the tap. Once drawn from the Hunter River, the water was enclosed in pipes and stored in roofed reservoirs all the way through the system, providing protection from disease-causing pollution that even some modern Australian schemes can't achieve.

"Engineers Australia's official recognition of the Walka Scheme's heritage significance has rightfully placed the Walka Scheme among some of our country's greatest engineering achievements," he said.

The Res is open for tours, with participants selected by ballot. Register at [hunterwater.com.au/theres](http://hunterwater.com.au/theres).

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