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Drought prompts use of Tomago Sandbeds

Hunter Water will begin drawing water from the Tomago Sandbeds from Monday 3 June to provide additional security for the region's dams, which have fallen to their lowest levels in 13 years.

The Sandbeds are a safe and reliable back-up water supply that can provide 20 per cent of the Lower Hunter's drinking water during times of shortfall.

"The Tomago Sandbeds are a critical part of our drought response. During dry periods, there comes a crucial time when we need to start drawing water from the Sandbeds, because if we leave it too long, the water simply won't be there later in a drought," said Hunter Water Chief Investment Officer Darren Cleary.

"The safety of our drinking water is paramount. We've done a lot of work over decades to understand how the Sandbeds operate and how the water flows, and this includes extensive water quality testing.

"When we look to use the borefields within the Sandbeds as part of our water supply, we are extremely rigorous in the way we test the water to make sure it is safe for drinking. We routinely monitor the water at the borefields, then as it arrives at the treatment plant and again before it goes to our customers' homes.

"This testing confirms that our drinking water is safe and we make these results publicly available on our website. There is also careful review by regulators such as NSW Health to ensure the water from the Sandbeds meets the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

"Hunter Water has the ability to choose which bores are used and which are not when drawing water from the Sandbeds. We've isolated bore stations 7 and 9, which are located inside the Williamstown Management Area, as a precaution. These bores will not be used for supply.

"Our customers can have confidence in the controls that have been put in place to ensure their drinking water remains safe and meets the Guidelines," said Mr Cleary.

One of the reasons Hunter Water doesn't operate the Sandbeds continuously is due to the high costs involved in treating the water.

"Due to the geology of the Sandbeds, the water contains naturally higher levels of iron and the mineral manganese. These elements are difficult for us to remove at our water treatment plant and can result in some discolouration.

"Discoloured water is not a health issue. If customers experience discoloured water, we recommend they first try turning their tap on full for a few minutes to clear the pipes," said Mr Cleary.

Operating the Sandbeds forms part of Hunter Water's drought response. We're encouraging our customers to continue to love water and help us preserve our precious resource.

For more information on the Tomago Sandbeds or to view our water quality testing results, visit www.hunterwater.com.au/tomago.