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AUSTRALIA ENJOYS GOOD QUALITY RAINWATER

The Rainwater Harvesting Industry considers the recent ABC article titled *“Tank water: How to protect yourself from gastro, toxic metals and more”* as poor reporting. Far from saying that all rainwater is unsafe for human consumption the Australian Environmental Health Committee (Enhealth) *Guidance on use of Rainwater Tanks* states that “In most areas of Australia, the risk of illness arising from (rainwater) consumption is low” with some common sense precautions. Over 2 million or 10% of Australians drink rainwater every day and the risk of contracting illness from well-maintained systems is very low. (Enhealth, 2010). “Portraying all rainwater as toxic is scaremongering and does not reflect the official advice.” said Stuart Heldon, Business Unit Director at Kingspan Environmental.

None of the experts referenced the National Guidelines or important research showing a natural treatment train in rainwater tanks that neutralises bacteria and heavy metals within the rainwater tank (Spinks, 2007). None of the experts explained that despite evidence of contaminants there is very little evidence of widespread health impacts, hence the low risk assessment by Enhealth. The Flinders University source quoted by the ABC noted that there was no evidence of people having increased levels of gastro, directly contradicting the heading. There is good research indicating the incidence of gastro from untreated rainwater is not higher than the general population (Heyworth, 2001). The CSIRO was careful to note there was no evidence of people becoming ill in their study and we note that the tanks in their study were not actually used for drinking but this was not reflected in the ABC report. None of the experts and nobody at the ABC appear to have sought a view from the rainwater harvesting industry.

The Rainwater Harvesting Industry supports the Enhealth position that recommends Australians drink mains water where it is available, however it is simple to manage rainwater to meet drinking water standards, there is good evidence that rainwater is generally good quality and there is no evidence of widespread negative health impacts. The Rainwater Harvesting Industry would welcome an apology from the ABC.

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Ends

Company profile – Independent Water Council

The Independent Water Council is a not for profit alliance of water industry stakeholders including the Association of Rotational Moulders Australasia (The Water Tank Group), Irrigation Australia, Rainwater Harvesting Association of Australia, Australian Water Association, Stormwater Australia and the Australian Wastewater Treatment Association. The objective of the Council is to market the importance of independent water sources, appropriate resource management & policy development.

Independent Water Council website: www.independentwatercouncil.org

