

**Question on Notice  
No. 1532  
Asked on 30 November 2006**

**QUESTION:**

MR DICKSON asked the Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism (Ms Nelson-Carr)—

- (1) How many spills or treatment failures occurred from Queensland sewage treatment plants in the last 12 months?
- (2) What were the reasons, the locations and the action taken by her department and local authorities?

**ANSWER:**

- (1) 249 spills and 20 treatment failures from Queensland sewage treatment plants were reported to the Environmental Protection Agency during the previous 12 months.
- (2) Of these, 74 were associated with wet weather events; 6 were as a result of mechanical failures; 54 were caused by power failures; and sewer blockages resulted in 47 releases to the environment.

The accidental rupture of sewage system pipelines associated with construction and maintenance works by third parties resulted in 22 releases.

Of the overflow events reported, 30 of these were associated with Cyclone Larry.

For the remaining failures, the reasons for the spill or failure are unidentified.

Sewage treatment plants are generally designed to treat three times the normal flow in dry weather. During heavy rainfall, plant capacity can be exceeded due to stormwater infiltration. Any overflow in this situation is highly diluted.

Treatment failures were caused by mechanical problems, for example the failure of pumps or the failure of disinfection equipment.

Approximately 97% of overflows were in the coastal strip east of the Great Dividing Range — 68% in south-east Queensland, 23% in the Cairns district and 6% in the remaining coastal shires.

Local government responded to all of the abovementioned incidents by containing the spill; clearing blockages; connecting standby generation

equipment in the event of power failure; or commencing investigations into the actions of third parties that caused the rupture of pipes.

The Environmental Protection Agency commenced investigation into these spills and used enforcement tools such as issuing warning notices, penalty infringement notices and environmental protection notices, or requiring environmental investigations or audits. One restraint order was issued and one prosecution action was commenced.