

MEDIA RELEASE (for immediate release)

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Absence of excavation damage prevention a persistent and significant gap in the performance of the national water reform agenda

The Productivity Commission's National Water Reform inquiry is an immediate opportunity to close the gap on structural, persistent and measurable failures across multiple assessment cycles in the National Water Initiative (NWI).

Before You Dig Australia says the absence of excavation damage prevention from the reform agenda, regulatory fragmentation and poor asset data quality could undermine any new National Water Agreement.

"Policymakers and regulators designing the new National Water Agreement can no longer overlook the costly issue of water utility service strikes," BYDA CEO Mell Greenall said.

"Australia's underground water network is critical national infrastructure. Every effort must be made to address all risks and threats, including accidental and deliberate utility strikes, to such essential assets.

"The systematic under-protection of critical water infrastructure from foreseeable, preventable third-party damage is incompatible with the NWI's core objective of delivering economic, social and environmental outcomes for Australians."

In its latest submission to the Commission's inquiry assessing progress made against the 2004 National Water Initiative, BYDA contends that:

- Infrastructure under-investment analysis is incomplete without accounting for the cost of unplanned, excavation damage to water assets;
- Persistent gaps in data standards, compliance, enforcement and accountability also undermine progress in water reform, and;
- Buried water assets - water mains, sewer lines, stormwater infrastructure, recycled water networks - are the physical delivery mechanism for water services that achieve the economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Public water service outages are among the more than 15,000 reported underground utility strikes costing the national economy almost \$5 billion each year through project delays and service disruption. The true figures and cost are likely three times higher than current available data.

"The way we solve these challenges is by first acknowledging utility damage by excavation activities as a substantial gap in water reform," Greenall said.

“Second, improving minimum data standards and the sharing of national data insights for more effective and appropriate levels of regulation will help to significantly reduce the risk of utility strikes, measures that alone will save consumers and taxpayers at least \$1.1 billion a year.

“We’re talking about practical government-led reforms that are easy to implement simply by strengthening the legal and regulatory environment so the existing ecosystem can operate effectively.

“We encourage the Productivity Commission to ensure these reform recommendations are implemented in full, because they will contribute to keeping Australia’s water secure and affordable while making the sector more productive and sustainable in the long term.”

Download BYDA’s submissions to the Productivity Commission’s National Water Reform 2026 Public Inquiry:

- **Interim Update 1** [Submission 73 - Before You Dig Australia \(BYDA\) - National Water Reform 2026 - Public inquiry](#)
- **Interim Update 2 submission** [2026-07-BYDA-submission-PC-Nat-Water-Reform-2026-update-2.pdf](#)

For further information, case studies, multimedia or requests to interview BYDA CEO Mell Greenall, contact:

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About Before You Dig Australia

BYDA is a not-for-profit, industry-led organisation that operates Australia’s national “before you dig” referral service. Each year we facilitate more than 2.7 million requests for underground utility information from contractors, engineers, councils and the public.

Our role is to connect those planning excavation with the asset owners responsible for critical infrastructure to prevent damage, disruption and injury. Read our latest research report [here](#).