

MEDIA RELEASE (for immediate release)

10 July, 2026

Address utility strikes and data standards to ensure secure, resilient, sustainable water supplies, BYDA urges Productivity Commission

Excavation damage prevention and utility location data standards supremacy must be included in national water reform to ensure future water services are secure, resilient and sustainable.

As the national “before you dig” referral service, Before You Dig Australia (BYDA) warns policymakers and regulators cannot overlook the costly issue of preventable underground water utility service strikes.

In a submission to the Productivity Commission’s National Water Reform 2026 Public Inquiry, BYDA applauds the Commission for correctly identifying common issues including infrastructure failures and poor data standards as a primary threat to water service continuity.

“The Commission’s definition of resilience - resistance, recovery and robustness - directly reflects the consequences of utility strikes on water infrastructure,” BYDA CEO Mell Greenall said.

“Damage to water mains, sewer lines, stormwater assets and treatment infrastructure by excavation work – whether accidental or deliberate - causes immediate service disruption, triggers costly emergency repairs, and accelerates asset degradation.

“Yet neither this current inquiry nor the broader national water reform agenda identify excavation damage prevention as a lever for improving infrastructure resilience.”

Public water service outages are among the more than 15,000 reported underground utility strikes that occur each year in Australia, costing the national economy \$4.6 billion through project delays and service disruption.

“On average, there are at least 41 preventable utility strikes every day, one every 20 minutes in daylight hours – and these are the ones we know about,” Ms Greenall said.

“The way we prevent such incidents is through government-led reforms, for example: improving the quality and accessibility of underground asset data, including minimum standards and digital data sharing that can save consumers and taxpayers **\$782 million a year**.

“Tools such as BYDA’s new digital utility portal currently being piloted in Brisbane’s Olympics precinct, Sydney, Perth and northwest WA are also a practical solution that can complement national reforms but this does need more substantial collaboration from government and the utility sector.”

BYDA's submission to the Productivity Commission makes four recommendations for reform to address six issues arising from the National Water Reform 2026 update, including:

- Infrastructure failure as a central resilience risk;
- Asset management, investment efficiency and data quality;
- National data standards and reporting consistency;
- Regulatory burden, coordination and compliance gaps;
- Governance, accountability and role clarity, and;
- Regional and remote vulnerability.

"The responsibility for preventing strikes typically sits with frontline workers but the power to improve underlying conditions rests with governments, regulators and asset owners," Ms Greenall said.

"This is an immediate opportunity for government leadership to enable a digital data system – a single source of truth - that can save billions of dollars and reduce risk as well as ensuring the security, resilience and sustainability of future water supplies."

Download BYDA's submission to the Productivity Commission's National Water Reform 2026 Public Inquiry: [2026-07-BYDA-submission-PC-Nat-Water-Reform-2026-updates.pdf](#)

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

Simon Mossman

Head of Insight, Research and Advocacy
Before You Dig Australia
0417 064 104
simon.mossman@byda.com.au

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](#).