

MEDIA RELEASE

Meet the experts behind ensuring the reliability of sewage testing for coronavirus – part of the national and international ColoSSoS Project

25 November, 2020

Testing wastewater to detect the virus causing COVID-19 is the key priority of the [ColoSSoS Project](#). The Australia-wide collaboration on Sewage Surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 (ColoSSoS) is giving our regulators, industry and the community confidence in the quality and reliability of testing methods.

Australia's National Measurement Institute (NMI), together with Water Research Australia (WaterRA), is playing a vital role in ensuring certainty in sewage testing for SARS-CoV-2; the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

Led by WaterRA, ColoSSoS aims to generate results from sewage testing for SARS-CoV-2 that can be integrated with health data for COVID-19 on a national basis to support governments' responses.

Reference materials developed by NMI in Sydney, using inactivated virus material prepared by the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory (VIDRL) in Melbourne, will enable laboratories across Australia and NZ involved with the ColoSSoS Project to understand how well their sewage testing methods work, particularly at low levels of SARS-CoV-2, and how much results can vary due to the test methods used.

ColoSSoS Project Director, Dr Kelly Hill, says NMI has worked tirelessly to support this work and the analytical laboratories involved are appreciative of their support, leadership and expertise in this field.

"It's great to see yet another example of Australian agencies and individuals working together to do their bit to help us all understand and fight COVID-19 in the region," Dr Hill said.

"We were only too happy to provide support to surveillance for SARS-CoV-2," said Dr Kate Griffiths, NMI Senior Scientist and ColoSSoS Project representative. "Developing reference materials is immensely challenging. I'm very appreciative of the hard work of our great team at NMI who have made this happen".

Dr David Cunliffe SA Health's Principal Water Quality Adviser, and chair of the Water Quality Expert Reference Panel of [enHealth](#), also acclaims NMI's expertise and capability. "NMI's approach to developing reference materials has helped us to communicate and build confidence between the environmental and clinical groups working in public health," Dr Cunliffe said.

The material will be used for calibration, understanding the limits of quantification and developing standard curves for sewage testing laboratories. NMI will also oversee an interlaboratory study by supplying 'standard sewage' and calibrants to the participating laboratories.

NMI will prepare an independent report from the data to enable laboratories involved with the study to analyse the performance of their sewage testing methods and make improvements, if needed.

NMI is no newcomer to the Australian water industry, and at times such as these the longstanding partnerships between Australian water authorities, health departments and research agencies have resulted in a fast and effective mobilisation of effort. The lasting legacy of this partnership between WaterRA and NMI will be the continuing development and improvement of water testing capabilities in Australia.

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For media enquiries, please contact:

Michael Jones, Manager - Communications, National Measurement Institute
E: michael.jones@measurement.gov.au

Kathryn Nicholas, Communications Lead, Water Research Australia
E: kathryn.nicholas@waterra.com.au

About the National Measurement Institute

The National Measurement Institute (NMI) is the Australian Government's national authority on measurement. Our role is to help develop and maintain Australia's physical, chemical and biological measurement standards. We play an important role in the economy by [maintaining and regulating Australia's measurement system](#), developing and maintaining national measurement standards, and delivering world-class measurement products and client services.
www.industry.gov.au/strategies-for-the-future/national-measurement-institute

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