

Sale of water is banned, and that's just lubbly bubbly

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Thirsty work . . . Claudia Saunders, the environmental captain at Monte San't Angelo, tests one of the bubblers the school installed after students pushed for a ban on the sale of bottled water. Photo: Marina Neil

A NORTH Sydney school is believed to have become the first in NSW to ban bottled water and offer free tap-water refills to cut down on plastic waste.

Students at Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College pushed for the ban on the sale of bottled water at the canteen. For good measure, there have also been moves to get rid of "unethical" chocolate frogs and reduce packaging in school lunches. Several schools in Sydney are about to adopt similar measures.

"We'd just like to get the point out that the consumption of water from plastic bottles is completely unnecessary," said Claudia Saunders, a year 10 student who has been appointed "environmental captain".

"At least with the water stations . . . the bottles are going to be used more than once."

Ms Saunders said environmental plans had been the subject of healthy debate at the school. "I wouldn't say there has been any resistance, but I guess a lot of people find it difficult to change behavioural patterns, or realise that individual actions will actually make a difference."

Banning bottles has proved a boon for the humble bubbler, which is enjoying a resurgence in schools and public spaces.

Manly, Mosman, Waverley, the City of Sydney and Marrickville are all trying to limit sales of bottled water by installing more public drinking fountains.

Shopkeepers in the Southern Highlands town of Bundanoon banned the sale of bottled water last year and the main street was lined with drinking fountains.

The environmental campaigner Jon Dee said he had entertained dozens of inquiries from towns and councils about going down the same path.

But the Australian bottled water industry says sales have remained strong, rising about 5 per cent this year, after a slight dip during the global financial crisis.