



Supporting Sustainable Water Use in the Namoi Catchment

Namoi Water

15 April 2013

Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.asu

Ms S Dunstone
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 [Provisions]

Submission by Namoi Water and Namoi Community Network to the Senate Inquiry into the EPBC Act Amendments Bill 2013.

Namoi Water (NW) is the peak industry group for irrigated agriculture in the Peel, Upper Namoi and Lower Namoi Valleys in the North West of NSW. We are a non-profit, non-political organisation supporting our members to achieve a sustainable irrigation industry that meets the environmental, economic and social needs of our local communities.

Namoi Community Network (NCN) is an affiliated committee under Namoi Water. NCN was established by the community in 2011 to ensure the Namoi Catchment Water Study (the Study) commissioned by NSW DTRIS in 2010 was completed proficiently and within its terms of reference. Although the Study was completed and published in July 2012, the committee has continued to meet to pursue its concerns. We do not limit our concerns solely to irrigation water, but to ground water and surface water from all sources.

The amendments proposed to the EPBC Act are fully supported by both Namoi Water and Namoi Community Network.

The security of water resources and water quality remain the prime concerns of both organisations. It became apparent as the Study concluded there will be significant detrimental impacts to the water resources of the Namoi Valley from extractive industries, unless protection is provided under Federal legislation.

The national significance of water to Australia cannot be over stated. In our geographic region, the food production capabilities of the premium black soils, which have world

significant physical qualities, could be seriously reduced. The Study did demonstrate extractive industries could adversely affect ground and surface water; this essential element for the environment, and our future food production.

Under the proposed amendments water will finally be considered as a resource of national environmental significance, and appropriate recommendations will have to be made by the Independent Expert Scientific Committee (IESC) to the Regulator on all coal mining and coal seam gas development applications referred to it.

To abdicate this responsibility to the States, does not guarantee a proper scientific appraisal will be completed before operational approval is granted, or even before exploration licences are given and financial incentives received.

In NSW, the Aquifer Inference Policy and Strategic Land Use Policy of the current State Government are seen to be inadequate and do not ensure due consideration for this vital natural resource. There is no regulation presently in the NSW Aquifer Interference Policy and the euphemistically named 'Gateway process' of the NSW Government has a gate that doesn't close!

Though the NSW government have still not commissioned a Peer Review of the Namoi Catchment Water Study, the Study's findings are well respected by all interested parties, and it provide IESC with a reliable scientific reference for their deliberations.

Bio regional assessments such as those currently being completed on the North West NSW are by our understanding, to be replicated across other regions of Australia considered having national environmental significance.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to make this presentation and considering our joint submission.

Hugh Price,
Chairman Namoi Community Network
A Namoi Water Committee