

16 June 2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on
Environment, Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry in Water (Crisis Powers and Floodwater Diversion) Bill 2010

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the above Senate Inquiry. Apologies for the delay.

The NFF does not support this Bill as it seeks to circumvent a significant reform of water planning in the Murray-Darling Basin. This process is underway with a release of the proposed Basin Plan midyear, with a final Basin Plan due in 2011. These arrangements will ensure that as each water resource plan expires, it will be replaced with plans that comply with the Basin Plan, i.e. are accredited by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. In the meantime, the transitional and interim plans are in place to govern the management of water. Even where these plans are suspended, NFF understands that Government's are managing water effectively to comply with the plan.

NFF does have serious specific concerns with the Bill. The commencing and ending provisions for example. Those that relate to high security allocations will create confusion as allocations vary significantly during an irrigation season. This will result in the powers switching on and off in quick succession. These provisions also do not aide those irrigators on lower security entitlements. As a result, one entitlement type is favoured over others, including those with the highest security, stock & domestic water users and the environment.

Moreover, the other provision relates to South Australia's pinnacle environmental asset, the Lower Lakes and Coorong. It ignores other just as important assets. Moreover, there could be a significant flood event on the Murray (e.g. the 1956 Flood) which prevents the trigger conditions at the Lower Lakes being activated, yet a moderate flood in the northern Basin may well be required to supply Broken Hills' critical human needs.

Ultimately, the NFF sees no benefit in this Bill which is seeking to circumvent the longer term reform that is currently underway. Short term solutions inevitably fail and this Bill is an excellent example of attempts to ensure one State is advantaged at the cost of other environmental assets , other communities, other states and other irrigators.

NFF supports the reform of the Basin's water resources; however, this must be done in a way that is equitable to the environment, to rural communities and to irrigators across the Basin. To do otherwise will result in untenable consequences.

NFF does not believe that the State Governments will refer the necessary powers, and it is unlikely that the Federal Government or Opposition will support this Bill. It is unlikely, therefore, to succeed.

Yours sincerely

DEBORAH KERR
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