



4 June 2010

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

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Water (Crisis Powers and Floodwater Diversion) Bill 2010 – Submission to the Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Legislation Committee

Western Murray Irrigation Limited (WMI) is a privately owned irrigation corporation established in 1995 to supply irrigation water to over 400 customers in the Buronga, Coomealla and Curlwaa Irrigation Districts. The company has a bulk NSW Murray high security licence. The irrigators in these districts predominantly produce wine grapes and citrus, dried fruit and vegetables. Water use efficiency is high with less than 3% of the irrigated area under flood irrigation.

WMI is a member of the National Irrigators Council and the NSW Irrigators Council. WMI **supports in full** the submissions from these entities to the Senate Committee

WMI believes the Senate Committee should reject the Bill outright as it has the ability to significantly harm Basin communities and the environment through its focus on the Lower Lakes as the one key environmental asset.

It overrides the processes established to date to work in a co-operative manner during times of extreme water shortage. It undermines the work being undertaken to develop a properly researched Basin Plan where all areas of the Basin are consulted and appropriate technical expertise has been engaged.

It undermines the current structure of the independent Murray Darling Basin Authority that is accountable to an elected Minister. The Bill adds to the uncertainty

already being experienced across the Basin due to the significant levels of water reform being undertaken.

Water shortages have been experienced across the Basin and reflect a lack of rain. The flood events in Queensland earlier this year has been very positive for the environment with the parched landscape taking up the water. The Murray Darling Basin Authority now has control of the Menindee Lakes where the water is shared equally by the states while protecting Broken Hill's water supply.

The water entitlement structure, which is different for each State, is no basis to determine a "crisis". **A true crisis is if human drinking needs could not be met and this has already been addressed in the Federal Water Act. Despite the severe drought the current management regimes have secured drinking water for the key towns in the Basin or made alternative arrangements when necessary.**

The Basin is not a single system, as many valleys are not interconnected. The Bill recommends the suspending, varying or replacement of water sharing plans in times of crisis. In the NSW Murray the water sharing plan **has been suspended** for three years by the State Government and critical water planning enacted. This process has been very effective as "river operators" who are experienced in effective river management and modelling run it. This same level of expertise does not exist at the Federal level.

The water market is a critical component of the business of WMI irrigators and the Water Bill 2010 has the potential to interfere with and destroy the operation of the water market.

Yours sincerely,
Cheryl Rix
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