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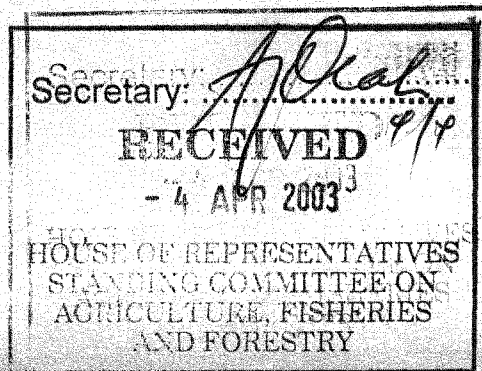
April 2003

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Members,

I was unaware of this Committee until following up on an ABC Landline programme, so please forgive my tardiness in submitting the attached.

Yours sincerely



SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE on AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES & FORESTRY on WATER MANAGEMENT in AUSTRALIA

Submitted by Max de Mestre-Allen

Let me say, firstly, I am not a hydraulic engineer, just a person who has had an interest in saving water, particularly since spending some years on a property between Nyngan and Cobar in the early '60s

In my early days I sometimes attended a Men's Forum meeting with my Father. One of the speakers I always enjoyed was an elderly gentleman by the name of Michael Sawtell. This man had been a stockman for many years with Sir Sidney Kidman and therefore knew the Australian "bush" and its foibles. He regularly talked about the Ord River scheme and how, when finished, it would transform that area into a food bowl. I have not been to that area but from reports the scheme was a success. Water was the secret.

From my time spent west of Nyngan I came to the conclusion that all a large proportion of the inland needs is water. The property I was on had never grown vegetables until I arrived and I ploughed up a bit of dirt and raked it into garden beds surrounded by a bund. A few handfuls of seeds scattered on the beds and watered a couple of times a week with a pump from the dam and we were giving away vegies we had so many. All that was needed was water. Some of the ridges out there are too stoney but the soil in the flat country will grow almost anything if water is provided. I have no doubt there are hundreds of thousands of hectares in this vast land that are the same as I encountered.

We cannot afford to waste a drop of water in Australia and must try to re-use the same water over and over again by recycling.

All the rivers in this country need to run. This has been brought home to us by the problems in the Murray and Snowy Rivers; therefore we must use what we take from the rivers more wisely. Water taken from rivers must be transported to the site of use in pipes, as was mentioned last year, not by open canals. This will cost money but what has the current drought cost the country? Is it possible to water some crops by a drip feed system rather than sprays which lose a lot in evaporation?

Dams must be built on every river in the tropic and sub-tropic area where huge amounts of water run to waste each wet season. I don't mean just one dam per river. I mean two or three dams per river if the water flow will support it. We lost millions of megalitres of water in the recent floods up in north Queensland. Water that, if used in the right place, could have at least eased the drought problem and dams would have eased the flood problem.

Transportation of water from the source to the use point is a simple matter of pipes and tunnels and pumping stations. It was done in the Snowy Scheme, and that was years ago, so there is no reason it can't be done on a larger scale today and, relatively, should not be any more expensive. Technology has moved forward in leaps and bounds in the intervening years to make this sort of project feasible.

Having said all of the above how do we overcome the problem of rivers rising in one State, flowing through the next State and finally emptying into the sea in another State? There is only one answer, and that is the Federal Government must takeover responsibility for all waterways that flow into the sea. No doubt the States will scream "no way", but if there is a will there is a way. **Water resources must be looked at in a "whole of Australia" attitude.**

Maybe a sweetener, in the form of a subsidy, to allow the States to bring their effluent water up to a standard suitable for use other than drinking or washing would help. This would allow the same water to be used many times over and no doubt the States would turn that into money some way. Every new housing and industrial estate must have two water systems, one for clean water for washing and drinking and the other for the grey or recycled water for general use. A simple colour code system would be used for pipes and taps.

Water tanks should be encouraged for all houses. Water from these could be used for everything bar drinking and cooking, as I believe the pollution on roofs in city and suburbs could make its use for such purposes a little "suss". We must remember, however, that water from roofs eventually find its way into creeks and streams and therefore a close watch must be kept on how much water is kept in house tanks so as not to deprive small waterways of their flushing cycle. Maybe a limit on the size of household tanks is probably the answer.

I don't have all the answers nor all the questions, and I doubt whether one person has, but if we all take an overall look rather than a parochial view, the solution is not beyond us.

**WATER IS MONEY AND WE HAVE TO SPEND A
DOLLAR TO GET A DOLLAR.**