



P.O. Box 8
Forest Hill
Queensland, 4342

30th September, 2002

Mrs Kay Elson MP
Chair – House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

RE: Inquiry into Water Supplies for Australia's Rural Industries

Dear Mrs Elson,

Please find attached a submission to the above Standing Committee on behalf of the Lockyer Valley water users.

You will note that we would seek leave to address the committee during the public hearings to present further information and offer possible solutions to the complex issue of water management in the Lockyer Valley.

Yours Sincerely

(original signed by;)

Paul Emmerson

Geoff Logan

Michael Forbes

Gordon Van der Est

Paul Emmerson
on behalf of;
Upper Lockyer Water Users
Association Inc. (IA 31220)

Geoff Logan
on behalf of;
Central Lockyer
North

Michael Forbes
on behalf of;
Central Lockyer
South

Gordon Van der Est
on behalf of;
Central Lockyer

House of Representatives Standing Committee
Inquiry into future water supplies for Australia's rural
industries and communities

Submission by the Lockyer Valley Irrigators

Executive Summary:

This submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is made on behalf of the irrigators and water users of the Lockyer Valley. We are an incorporated association and represent more than 450 water users from the Central and Upper Lockyer Water Users Groups encompassing the areas of Tenthill Creek, Upper Laidley Creek, Sandy Creek and Central Lockyer.

We support the long-term sustainability of our water resources however we oppose any action that will adversely impact on our livelihood and retrospectively devalue our land.

We contend that for more than 80 years we have made a considerable contribution to the economy of Australia while at the same time we have managed our water resources in a responsible manner and that the resource is self generating and sustainable. Moreover, we have continually introduced new practices to conserve our water resource and optimise the productivity of our land.

Our group has commissioned a number of studies and reviews and has collected substantial supporting scientific evidence. We would seek leave to present a summary of this data along with recommendations to the Committee at the time of the proposed public hearings.

Introduction:

The Lockyer Valley is 100 km west of Brisbane. In short, it is the 'vege bowl' for not just Brisbane, but the wider East Coast and also for export with some five hundred semi trailers of produce being shipped from the region each week with an annual value of more than \$5 million.

Because of the climate, multiple crops are grown on the same ground each year making the area highly productive. In addition to vegetables, fruits and nuts, fodder crops and some grains are also grown along with a well established dairy industry. The majority of crops are irrigated from ground water.

The industry is labour intensive, employing a high number of unskilled workers. One farm alone employs more than 300 pickers and packers. In addition to farm workers, the region maintains a large supporting work force in a number of industries including machinery sales and service, trucking and transport, and fertiliser and farm supplies. In the main, the properties are family owned and run, many now with fourth generation owner/farmers.

Water is currently drawn from three sources, ground water via the aquifer, overland flow and storage and to a lesser extent creek flow. The ground water aquifer has been tapped for some eighty years and it is regularly recharged by rainfall and creek run off.

Land with access to water is considerably more valuable than land with no water, in some areas, the factor is as high as tenfold. Many farmers of recent times have increased their land holdings, paying a significant premium for the water.

During recent years we have become more efficient in our use of water. Techniques such as trickle irrigation have, in some areas, reduced water usage up to 70%. In addition, the introduction of new varieties of higher yielding crops has also increased the productivity of farms. However, these improvements are tempered by diminishing prices for produce.

Current Situation:

With federal COAG payments to state governments being linked with progress towards National Competition Reforms, the Queensland Government through the Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNR&M) has commenced a process of proposed water allocations. We contend this in fact stifles competition and retrospectively penalises small family farmers, the backbone of the area.

In their haste to meet Federal time-lines, DNR&M have based much of their decision making on questionable science, 'a one size fits all approach' and little or no regard of economic impact.

The current policy of proposed water allocations to some areas in fact creates artificial economic zones where the border is literally a road. Those on one side maintain the status quo; those on the other have severely limiting allocations.

The level of allocations will, in many cases, restrict growers to one crop per year and or, force them to grow lower value crops, requiring less water, than previously grown. Some farmers in the area have been penalised with proposed water cuts in excess of 80% while others are to receive increases. Water allocations have been made on

the basis of land area, not previous water usage. In short it penalises small landowners and will force many to halve their crop output, effectively halving their income without a proportionate drop in overheads.

DNR&M do not propose to pay compensation to those impacted. We would argue that this is not consistent with the intent of the National Competition Policy.

Considerations:

In determining the issue of water usage a number of factors need to be considered:

- The economic impact any restrictive allocations will have not just on growers but on the wider community
- Research and incentives for more economical use of existing water while maintaining current or increased production levels.
- The issue of added bureaucratic costs for no perceived benefit
- Water rights to remain with the land and not to be traded or transferred.
- The impost of high cost renewed water and the impact it will have on the current 'clean green' image.
- Better utilisation and upgrades of existing infrastructure.
- Better flood mitigation which in turn boosts water storage.

Conclusion:

We accept that some form of management is inevitable, however, we believe that any decision regarding the water resources of the Lockyer should be based on robust scientific and economic data and in consultation with farmers. This should be undertaken in a timely manner and not rushed through in an adhoc nature to satisfy short-term political expediency. Furthermore, the introduction of any new management of the resource should produce a derived benefit to all and should not have an adverse economic impact on existing growers without adequate compensation.

We are in the process of completing a major survey of both the historic and current water use in the Lockyer Valley and the associated issues for its long term viability. This survey will be completed and analysed by the end 2002. We will forward a copy of our findings and would seek leave to appear before the House of Representatives Standing Committee at the time of the public hearings to present our findings and our recommendations for the long-term sustainable management of the Lockyer Valley water resources.

Supporting Documentation:

Our organisations have collected considerable data on water usage in the Lockyer area. The following is provided as supporting and background information:

1. Map of the Lockyer Valley; Existing Water Storage Locations, Queensland Department of Primary Industries. Water Resources. (forwarded by mail as hard copy)