

ATKINSON BUARABA CATCHMENT LANDCARE GROUP INC.

11 April 1999

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Inquiry into Infrastructure & Development of Australia's Regional Areas

Water Infrastructure is the key to making best use of underutilised infrastructure in our region 80km West of Brisbane.

Over the last eight years of drought our community has been on a downward spiral. Student population at the local Coominya School, as an indicator for the community, has halved in the last five years. This reflects the impact on businesses, jobs and the whole community.

Atkinson Dam has only supplied full allocation for irrigation two years of the last eight and is now considered an unreliable water source at a time when irrigators need to be intensifying production to maintain, or regain viability. A recently completed scoping study on the proposed Wivenhoe to Atkinson Dam Pipeline, has indicated 1000's of jobs are lost now, which could be restored with water. Plus there is the potential to increase the intensity of agriculture, and secure higher quality overseas markets.

Without water security none of the other infrastructure is needed. In our region all of the other infrastructure is available and not used to its full potential.

The role of government to provide water infrastructure should not be underestimated. Water for irrigation has the value of a large multiplier effect, which means flow on benefits for the whole community. If the community has to become reliant upon users to pay for the infrastructure then development will be delayed indefinitely, opportunities will be lost, and towns will continue to die. It should be fair to expect users to pay for operating costs, and the community pays for infrastructure as it truly is in the whole communities' benefit.

There is also the risk in private ownership of water infrastructure, in that users could be dictated to about the use of water, as opposed to market signals directing best use of water.

Deregulation of infrastructure may not lead to lower costs, as evident in the dairy industry deregulation. (Although legislation changes are required for irrigators to access the excess stored water in Wivenhoe Dam, which is currently urban use storage)

Greg Banff
Chairman
ABC Landcare Group Inc.