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WATER OR THE LACK OF IT.

SUBMISSION NO. 89

During my time in Local Government I had a fair bit to do with the One in One Hundred Year Flood programme conducted by the Federal Government. Huge sums have been spent on levee banks. In some cases, as here in Cobram, a metre has been added to the height of the banks. Whether it will be a good thing or not I sometimes wonder.

Unfortunately very little has been done on the conservation side of things, or more correctly, perhaps a One in One Hundred Year Drought. And we are perhaps getting very close to that stage now.

The reservoirs are low. Eildon is down to 25% capacity and severe restrictions on irrigation will be necessary. When restrictions are necessary, irrigation is the first thing to suffer. Yet the products produced by irrigation supply the livelihood of all the towns throughout the Murray Goulburn basin.

Take the Cobram area. Nearly all the employment here centers around Murray Goulburn, Meija, Kraft, Abbotoirs and fruit and vegetable produce. If irrigation cannot be maintained production of the raw material cannot be maintained and employment right down the line will suffer.

A major project for this town and all other towns from Albury to Adelaide should be to lobby for more storage to be constructed. And the sites are there to do that on the upper reaches of the Murray and the Buffalo river.

Far too much water is allocated to environmental releases and these should be stopped before irrigation is rationed. These releases account for nearly half a million megalitres for other purposes. The Darling River Basin is suffering from a much longer drought and no water is coming in from there. This has to be replaced by water from Hume and Dartmouth

Rural industries and communities generate production of almost \$30 billion. A year. Sales and food processing valued at \$55 billion a year, and the entire sector employs more than 470,000 Australians.

The emphasis on increased storage should stress that no extension of irrigation area will be permitted and the existing areas to be given a longer buffer period if and when drought conditions apply.

Improvement in the irrigation system must be maintained. Laser grading, drainage and recycling dams have made great improvement in the use of water and control of salt. Entitlements for irrigation purposes are allocated for the use on a specified allotment and should not be used anywhere else. Any water not used should not be traded, but go back to the system and used as sales, equal to all users.

We hear a lot about no more reservoirs, but lets think where Victoria and Southern New South Wales would be without them, Melbourne included.

The National Party identified sites for five more reservoirs some three or four years ago. It is time for all political parties, farmers, factory workers, businessmen and environmentalists to get together and make a full scale investigation of the best approach to a One in One Hundred Year Drought. Could well be more storages and better controlled river flows would improve the environment in the river as well as provide an increased buffer period in drought conditions.

As a major drought affects three states, N.S.W., Victoria and South Australia we must look at a bigger picture than drought relief. Certainly drought relief is needed on the short term, but it is only band-aid treatment. Big money will be involved, but if the sale of Telstra takes place, big money will be available, and lets start planning for a much bigger drought now.

R.K. McDonald