

Dear Bronwen

I would like to submit the document below to the House of Representatives Standing committee on Environment and Heritage, inquiry into catchment management.

BRIEF SUMMARY

The main points to this submission refer to Irrigation practice in Northern Victoria and potential expansion of these areas and the problems associated with irrigation and salinity. Mention is made of consideration into a zero runoff proposal for irrigated areas as well as CSIRO testing on watering grape vines with 1/2 the water normally used. Other points are made of the nutrient input into our river systems from fertilizers and chemicals and how European carp have benefitted from the regulated river systems. The last point is in reference to fencing off river and creek banks from stock.

IN REFERENCE TO BEST PRACTICE METHODS

Irrigation areas in Northern Victoria

There needs to be a co-ordinated approach from the Federal and State governments as well as irrigators to replacing the leaking irrigation canals and channels. Upto 25% of the water in these channels is lost to seepage or evaporation before reaching the farms. In Australia we cannot afford this sort of loss. Replacing the channels with piping will be expensive but doing this will help reduce the amount of water seeping into the groundwater system and help lower the water table and reduce the salinity problem.

Some areas are replacing the channels now, but all areas require replacement where they have leaking channels. This will be expensive and requires Government assistance.

The Victorian Government are looking at expanding the irrigation areas in the Sunraysia district (Weekly Times July 28,1999). It is proposed that the region expands the irrigated areas from 18,000 ha to 68,000 ha. The water for this is supposed to come from the transfer of water entitlements and through water savings in the irrigation areas. Are these sort of developments going to be allowed to go ahead without environmental impact statements. Expanding irrigated areas is going to increase water usage and will take more water from the Murray River and will increase the groundwater level

unless strict controls are placed on what irrigation systems can be used.

How can we justify the expansion of the irrigation areas in areas of low rainfall, depauperate soils and with salinity problems. Industries are allowed to proceed that have a detrimental affect on the environment. These industries should only be allowed to start after water savings have been made, and after the irrigation canals have been replaced (in all irrigation areas), it's all too easy to say the water will be obtained from water savings and transfer of water entitlements, but until these savings are made, i don't believe expansion of the irrigation areas should be allowed to proceed.

The Federal government needs to be involved more in reducing the salinity problems, alternatives to flood irrigation requires intensive investigation, this is not a best practice method, it's the least expensive method and large amounts of water end up in the groundwater or evaporated.

The CSIRO have tested using drip feeds to feed one side of Grape Vines to see how they function, the plants apparently survive well, with no reduction in growth, this could be invesatigated for many crop industries. If the plants survive and grow with only 1/2 the water they normally recieve, that would be a huge benefit to the environment and farmers.

Victoria is into it's 33rd month of drought, many areas are facing water restrictions for the 3rd year in a row unless there are heavy spring rains. We need to stop wasting the water we have, we cannot build anymore dams, that is not the answer to the problems, better management of the water will help and we must allow enough water for the river ecosytems to function properly.

The Murray River mouth recieves only 20 % of water that enters the Murray, 80% is used by irrigators, towns, etc. Our native fish are suffering due to the regulation of the rivers, this has allowed the European Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) to increase it's range.

Many of the industries in our major catchment areas release high levels of nutrients into our river systems, blue-green algae has been a problem and seems to be getting worse each summer. There needs to be encouragement or inducements to stop this happening. A zero water runoff policy from farm areas could be investigated to see if it was suitable for use in a variety of farming industries in Australia.

If there was no water runoff from the land there would be less nutrient problems. Maybe a levy could be placed on the use of chemicals, fertilisers and other environmentally damaging substances that finish up in the river system and to be used to rehabilitate the rivers. Carp thrive in present river conditions, Australian native fish don't.

Stock should be stopped from accessing rivers and creeks, so many river

banks are eroded due to Cattle, Horses and sheep accessing the rivers for water. Why can't farmers pipe the water they need for stock to tanks away from the river. Many creeks and rivers pass through private farmland and many of these have no fencing to stop stock access. The stock damage the banks, causing erosion and increasing water turbidity as well as adding nutrients to the water and increasing the the problems associated with our river systems. Fencing off all rivers and creeks will stop stock access.

If you require more information on any of the points i have raised, i can be contacted at the address below.

Sincerely

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