

SUBMISSION NO 47

Secretary: *A. Beer*
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 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
 STANDING COMMITTEE ON
 AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES
 AND FORESTRY

27 August 2002

The Chairwoman
 HR Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Madam,

SUBJECT: INQUIRY INTO FUTURE WATER SUPPLIES—COMMENT TO COMMITTEE

I am Lin M. Hall, a resident of the Beaudesert Shire who owns his own property at the address below. I make this comment on your Terms of Reference by myself and for myself only. I am not acting for any other person or organisation.

My only consideration in making this comment is to help to improve the future of water supplies in this rural area.

In making the comment I may have had to make some comments about the condition of the terms, or the context of the propositions that may seem to ridicule the writer—this is not my intention, only lack of finesse on my part in explaining my point of view. I do not intend to denigrate any person by these statements or suggestions.

I hope that the comments in this paper are taken as they are intended—as a means to help the Committee regulate to help us make better use of our resources, now and in the future.

My detailed comments follow in the accompanying pages.

Thank you for the opportunity to make these comments. I hope that your committee will keep me informed as time goes on and your deliberations lead to other opportunities to comment to you.

Yours faithfully



Lin M. Hall

These are my comments to the *Terms of Reference* issued in your undated document that has a Faxserver date of 3 July 2002. I do not intend to rewrite the terms and refer to them individually. I have listed things that I think that the committee should look at particularly and fit them into the terms as it sees fit.

1. You need to change the National Competition Policy. You need to do that because it does not ensure that scarce resources are husbanded during plenty and rationed during time of scarcity. The NCP is a bean-counters device that does not recognise the basics of a rural economy.
 - In this area Sunwater continues to sell water, at normal rates and quantities, through a period of drought. It is driven by the need to make its annual profit not by a need to ensure that the community has some water to be rationed until the catchment is replenished.
 - When there is no water left to sell Sunwater will go back to its political masters and tell them that it has a problem but, normally, not much before the situation is exhausted.
2. There is a severe voting imbalance between the rural and the urban sectors. There is no incentive for politicians to take any notice of the needs of the rural sector because they cannot, themselves, elect representatives to the Local, State and Federal bodies.
 - There are some directly elected by rural people for rural people, however, even then the urban peoples overwhelm the rural representatives.
3. Long term planners for water usage—rural consumers—have difficulty in adapting quickly to changes in government policies for the creation or use of water resources.
 - Many rural water users are looking at resource availability 10 to 20 years ahead. Any surety of supply less than that period is a useless proposition.
 - Any alteration of laws, by government, that is debated over a period of months and then gazetted with 28-days notice is an extremely short-term plan for those rural users. Few would be comfortable with less than 5 years notice of change.
 - Rural communities have experienced almost instant turnabouts by Ministers advised by their city-dwelling public servants.
4. The increased numbers of Rural Residential dwellers in some rural areas is of concern for rural farmers. Their ability to outvote the rural landowners in local body elections means that the priority changes to the rural residential sector. This loss of rural priority is a drain on the potential rural production and on Australia's rural resources.
5. National Competition Policy has no social implications but a very large social impact.
 - What part of the NCP requires that resources are husbanded for future generations?
 - Resources that are treated as infrastructure should not be consumables.
 - If you build a dam, how can you gain a return on investment from the dam alone? You can only gain that return from the water resource made available when the dam is working, trapping water. Is a dam a dysfunctional resource in a drought?
 - Is it possible that, in the case of water dams, the NCP, as interpreted by many, is placing the emphasis on the wrong resource? In other words, is the original intention of the NCP still valid? If not, what is to be done?
6. There are instances, in Queensland, where dams were created to satisfy a rural-consumers need but have lately been converted, largely or in considerable part, to residential consumption. Some incentive is needed to maintain the purpose of a water storage facility once it is in place. New requirements should not be satisfied from resources allocated elsewhere regardless of the immediate availability of a surplus. Such surpluses are, normally, short-lived.

- There needs to be an incentive for every residence to have self-contained water supplies.
 - Many of the old reasons for having centralised treated-water supplies have gone or were never valid.
 - Some centralised water treatment systems are kept operating because there is an employment impact.
 - Most centralised water systems are only *efficient* because their inefficiencies are hidden. For example—
 - why are people who do not need water from the system charged for *access* or *proximity* to the system?
 - why is there a smaller charge for bigger industrial users of water?
 - why is the basis charge for access to the system the same for all domestic users no matter the relative performance or cost of their part of the system.
 - Modern water trapping and storage techniques make urban household reservoirs practical. Just look at the numbers of rural residential dwellers using those techniques.
 - While there won't be a quick return on urban water storage the reduction in the need for stormwater drainage capacity and other water storage will make for savings equivalents.
7. Prediction of environmental effects is important. Money for that seems to be lacking.
- Research into long-term environmental effects of weather seems to be too costly right now, however, when the time comes it is easy to have 20-20 hindsight and realise that the money should have been spent.
 - There needs to be, on this driest of all continents, a world-class facility for predicting rainfall in every location where there is farming. It seems that only the UK and US have such facilities!
 - Why didn't every farmer have reasonable accurate information about the present dry spell at this time last year? How many politicians realise the timescale for crop management? Can any of you list 20 crops and say when the planning for planting should be finalised?
8. There needs to be more basic research and applied research into improving the use of water in agriculture. There are many techniques for better use of water, but not any very cheap ones.
- There needs to be better prediction of the availability of water.
 - There needs to be basic research into water management and use. That will include storage management too.
 - There needs to be applied research into methods of application of water that agricultural production can support.
 - There needs to be applied research into more productive dry-land crops.
 - There needs to be some expenditure of resources to do on-farm help, teaching and improvement.
9. There may need to be recognition that small, often on-farm, storage lakes and wetlands have been isolated from their water sources by bad management over many years. Those lakes and wetlands were replenished every flood and they stored water that was only used in drought. Nowadays there is nothing that can be done, legally, to capture floods to replenish those reservoirs.

- There needs to be recognition that, in years past, many reservoirs were accessed by floodwaters.
 - Over the years the flood-channels have been blocked making the reservoirs useless.
 - Many landowners would like to take floodwaters into those reservoirs but are prevented by law from doing that.
 - There needs to be recognition that some floodwaters need diverting, again, to recharge wetlands and lakes that are no longer reached by the floods.
 - What affect is the lack of such wetlands and lakes having on the replenishment of subterranean aquifers?
 - There may be a need to see that this management is not abused by the unscrupulous.
10. There may be reasons that small dams are more efficient than very large ones. Lack of research seems to be hampering the acquiring of such knowledge.
 11. There needs to be more research, basic and applied, into the reuse of water for industrial purposes.
 - More use needs to be made of recycled water in secondary industrial areas.
 - Incentives need to be provided to transport recycled water to primary producers.
 12. There needs to be closer coordination of State and Federal government in all aspects water supplies.
 - Rain does not respect governmental boundaries.
 - Rivers do not respect governmental boundaries.
 - Underground water storage does not respect governmental boundaries.
 13. There seems to be, in Australia, too little public understanding of the need for better husbanding of our water. Generally urban people, the majority of the voters, see little beyond the tap flowing water out of their wall. There needs to be a realistic and concerted effort to re-educate people on the scarcity of water. Such education needs to start in primary education facilities so that in 30 years we will have most people understanding the need for conservation, for efficient use and for realistic planning of water resources.