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STANDING COMMITTEE ON
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AND FORESTRY

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A Water Saving
Conceptual Idea

As a regular viewer of Landline I am accepting the suggestion (today's broadcast) to write to you with a conceptual idea that I have been thinking about for some time, regarding water conservation.

By observation it seems to me that most water conservation proposals fit into about three main categories i.e. using less water by:

1. More efficient delivery (covering canals, piping water from source to destination etc)
2. Better storage (Covering reservoirs, or constructing deeper dams with less surface areas)
3. More efficient use of what is taken from the environment (drip irrigation as opposed to flood irrigation, spray irrigation etc. Development of less water dependant horticultural crops and manufacturing and mining methods etc).

It occurs to me that, as Australia's population gets larger and/or as we attempt to produce food and other products to supply a world in which the population is also getting larger, there will turn out to be more or less a finite limit in what can be achieved by concentrating on these three points I have just mentioned.

Unless I am mistaken only a small amount of attention is currently being given to promoting methods of using, recycling and eventually even returning some of the water taken, back to the environment.

I hear of water being used, contaminated and then released into shallow ponds to be allowed to evaporate. This I believe is quite common where for instance mining is involved. Wouldn't it be better if this water was treated and re-used over and over again, or if, after a certain number of recycle uses, it was treated to a high standard and then released back into the environment?

Undoubtedly representatives of the industries that currently discharge wastewater to evaporate it will claim that it is not economic to recycle this water.

I put it to you that this is because water, through pumping licenses etc, has been so comparatively cheap and till now, so easily available.

If water becomes much more expensive, they will then almost certainly have a very different attitude to the profligate use of it and among other things, instead make more use of less, by recycling it.

The other factor, **availability**, is perhaps I believe the key factor though.

It is inevitable from what I hear, that most water quotas will be significantly reduced, so there should be an interest in recycling water internally in businesses and on farms anyway. Perhaps this recycling might be given some added support though, apart from the obvious government incentives to install equipment to recycle water.

Ultimately, getting good clean water back into the environment would seem to be the preferred objective.

What I would like to suggest for consideration is a **clean water credits scheme**, a little bit similar to the **carbon credits scheme** for air polluters. As I envisage it, it could be a NET water usage concept, based on at least two important requirements ie

1. A license holder can put water, providing it is to a minimum quality standard (I suggest a standard significantly better than the best standard that the river water reaches naturally), back into the river.
2. If a licensee puts at least say 50% more water back into the river than extra water drawn, over and above the license cap, within say one month for example, of drawing that water, there will be no surcharge or fine eg
    - License is for 10 megalitres over a specific period.
    - License holder draws 12 megalitres over that period.
    - The license holder must then put at least 3 megalitres of cleaned water back into the river within the statutory period, otherwise a surcharge or fine is incurred.

I hope that there are many opportunities for agricultural and other industries to do this, other than what they may be doing now ie

- In the worst-case scenario allowing their used polluted water to find it's own way back into the river, thus increasing the pollution instead of diluting it.
- In the other scenario, already mentioned, running the polluted water off into shallow ponds to allow it to evaporate.

This wastes the potential to recycle this water for the benefit of others downstream.

Even more it wastes the further potential to begin to lift the water quality downstream by mixing better quality discharged water with poorer quality stream water.

What I have suggested is just one example of the mechanics of a scheme, I happen to have thought of, which may not be practical for reasons unknown to me. I only ask that the "broad brush" concept be considered. There are probably much better ways of using the concept to achieve similar objectives.

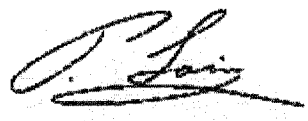
However, I do know from personal experience that there are already a number of reasonably cost efficient systems for treating a lot of different types of dirty wastewater. I also believe that as time goes on the technology will get even better than it is currently. More pollutants and a higher proportion of each of them will then be capable of being removed.

I believe that the suggestion made here, or something similar, might encourage those that can best do something about the situation to start doing so.

If it has the potential to work as well as carbon trading, perhaps it might be worthwhile looking into.

I would appreciate hearing your reaction.

Yours Sincerely



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