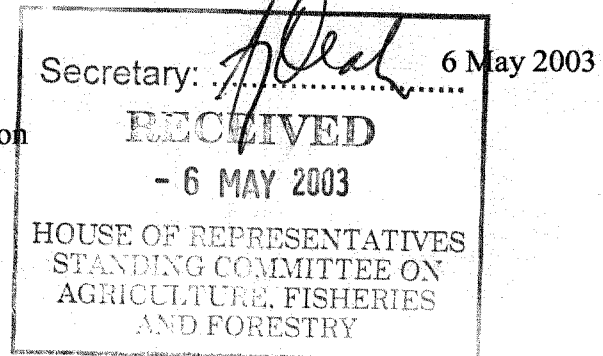


The Secretary
 House of Representatives Standing Committee on
 Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Sir/Madam

We refer to your call for submissions into your Committee's *Inquiry into future water supplies for Australia's rural industries and communities*. We have attached for your information a paper on *Developing Equitable and Affordable Responses to Drought in Australia* and a journal article which outlines the recent history of drought policy in Australia.

It is our view that consideration of water supplies and water usage cannot be undertaken without regard to the variable nature of Australia's climate and, in particular, how government policy responds to drought. As we have witnessed in recent months, drought is often the trigger for discussion of water availability and it is important that water policy be integrated with government approaches to drought.

Since 1992 there has been an important shift in the way governments have responded to drought in Australia. It is no longer treated as a natural disaster and there is much greater recognition that climate variability is a normal feature of the Australian environment. In this context "average" rainfall is little more than a statistical construct. Any plan to secure more reliable water supplies for rural and regional areas needs to recognise this variability and work with Australia's climate patterns rather than attempt engineering solutions aimed at imposing reliability.

We suggest that a move away from drought declarations and the provision of government support to drought-affected farmers on an individual needs-basis, as outlined in the attached paper, would contribute to better policy outcomes. We are proposing a more equitable scheme for the delivery of drought relief which would not require drought declarations and would have less potential for politicisation. By moving away from drought declarations, the community would be more likely to respond to climate variability as a part of the natural cycle rather than as an aberration.

Yours faithfully

Professor Bruce Chapman
 Centre for Economic Policy Research
 Research School of Social Sciences

Dr Linda Botterill
 Postdoctoral Fellow
 National Europe Centre

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION HELD BY THE SECRETARIAT

ATTACHMENT TO SUBMISSION NO. 154

1. *'Developing Equitable and Affordable Responses to Drought in Australia'*, Discussion Paper No. 455, December 2002.
2. *'Uncertain Climate: The Recent History of Drought Policy in Australia'*, Australian Journal of Politics and History: Volume 49, Number 1, 2003, pp. 61-74.