

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION NO. 93

Secretary: *after*.....

RECEIVED

28 OCT 2002

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES
AND FORESTRY

Dear Secretary

Thank you for accepting my submission to the Water Inquiry. I would like to make a supplementary submission, with additional information.

SUBMISSION TO WATER INQUIRY (27 October 2002)

With the drought sweeping the country, there is much discussion about water management and diverting water inland. There is also opposition in many quarters. I would sum up the water question this way...

How much water could be diverting from a river without significantly compromising its health and natural beauty?

Can we harness our waters and turn them inland? I think so, but with a sense of caution. We must work out how much water is required to keep the rivers healthy, as well as the communities that depend on them. We cannot just divert water without taking that into account. What would happen if we divert water from, say, the Clarence River to the Murray-Darling Basin and then the Clarence River region has a drought? Taking back its water would hurt the Murray-Darling, and we can't have that.

Before we resort to diverting our rivers, I agree that we should look to make better use of our existing water. Even with the drought at the moment, it is quite apparent that there is much water being wasted in our river systems. Surely we should work out how we can use the water more wisely and efficiently. Peter Andren, the Federal Independent MP, expressed such a view to Parliament in June 1999, and National Party Leader and Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson also seems to share this view. The Murray-Darling Basin has been subject to most discussion of wasted water, but I feel that we ought to look similarly at the Great Artesian Basin.

A few years ago I found an article on the Great Artesian Basin, written by Anthony Hoy in the BULLETIN (3/8/99), which was incredible. I made the following observations of facts and figures in that article...

- * The GAB loses annually some 300 000 megalitres (megs) of free-flowing groundwater, some 95% of its discharge
- * Some 1600 million litres are "mined" daily which is faster than the reserve can renew
- * Rural use is 500 000 megs per annum but up to 400 000 megs could be saved, and only 200 000 megs need be retained to balance the basin
- * Mining and oil only take 20 000 megs
- * GAB water is not infinite, according to the GAB Consultative Council and inland project expert Professor Lance Endersbee, because it takes lifetimes to renew
- * Endersbee reckons that wasted GAB water costs \$14b in lost production annually, or \$38m per day. These figures are incredible. Although the article was written three years ago, I'd be surprised if much has changed since then. What does it cost to control the free-flowing bores on which farmers and graziers in the GAB depend? The Government should fund a fair bit of the costs here, unless the private sector is willing to fund them. (I note that much of the GAB lies in the electorate of Independent Federal MP and water diversion backer Bob Katter.)

I should note also that locals around there don't seem to be interested in river diversions to become more productive. It seems that they want more an upgraded highway, to improve runs for cattle trucks. They see that as more beneficial to them.

I agree with the proposal of billionaire businessman Dick Pratt, to use pipes. Pratt seems to believe that piping and covering our irrigation channels would save a lot of water from loss through evaporation, up to 50%. It sounds incredible, but it's worth a try. I suggest that the

proposal be put to the test in a few regions - the Murray-Darling and Great Artesian Basins, and the wheat belt in Western Australia - where there are problems with lost water and salinity.

Mind you, some water diversion backers have taken the environmental factor into consideration. I note that, according to Ernie Bridge of the Watering Australia Foundation, the volume of water flowing through the Ord River in WA are so large that only a tiny proportion need be diverted to 'water the inland'. Like Pratt, Bridge has taken concerns of river health into consideration. And some environmental lobbies are giving some support to the proposals put up by Pratt.

Surely we should put Pratt's proposals to the test before we start to divert more water inland. I've heard about the Bradfield proposal of diverting water from wild rivers in northern Queensland, through one another, to central Australia. I'm not sure that this is the way to go as such, but we could look to divert at least when there is a risk of flooding. Similar ideas could apply to the Clarence and Macleay Rivers in northern NSW.

These areas have all been hit by floods in recent years, and what has happened to all that water? What can we do to our rivers so that towns and cities won't go under in times of flood? I feel that we could look at the Netherlands, where dams were built to protect regions from such floods. I note that in one case, public resistance to the building of one such dam, on environmental grounds, resulted in an open dam being built. This dam, on the Eastern Scheldt, remains open to protect the wildlife in the area and local fishing industry, and closed only when there is a risk of flood. Maybe we could apply such ideas here. If there are ways of storing and collecting water when there are floods, we must look at them. It's really sad to have seen so many places go under during floods - Grafton, Kempsey, Moree, Tamworth, Nyngan, and many other places.

In short, I believe that these things need to be considered and acted upon in any plans for 'drought-proofing' Australia. I feel that the Government should allow for tests of piping proposals forwarded by Dick Pratt, as a starting point. They seem to be the best way forward for the time being. We should be looking at open dams that can stay open to let rivers run freely, except when there are flood risks. We should be trying to control free-flowing bores in the Great Artesian Basin, and perhaps looking at ways of extracting water from the Officer Basin near Kalgoorlie in WA. I believe that these ideas would be helpful, in terms of water management and conservation in Australia, and should be looked at as early as possible.

WARREN GRZIC
37/230 Elizabeth Street
SURRY HILLS NSW 2010
02 92800825; 02 92498049

Surf the Web without missing calls! Get MSN Broadband.

<http://resourcecenter.msn.com/access/plans/freeactivation.asp>