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FIDELITY & FORTITUDE

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The Committee Secretary,
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Regional Australia,
Parliament House,
PO Box 6021,
Canberra. ACT. 2600

For information:

- Chairman, Murray Darling Basin Authority
- Member for Murray

Dear Secretary and Members of Committee,

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON
REGIONAL AUSTRALIA : THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN
WATER RETENTION, STORAGE AND MANAGEMENT
IN THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN**

Your Committee's initiative in seeking local wisdom concerning the river network is commendable. I pray that the Chairman and staff of the Murray Darling Basin Authority might do likewise

I enclose a further submission for your Committee's kind attention. The submission addresses current Ministerial enquiries, and presents concepts for new water storages, river network interconnection pipelines, and desalinated ocean water use. Mention is made of the massive volume of water drawn by *Cubby Station*. The *Station's* water licence might well be judged invalid for reasons of public interest.

Occasionally, poetry serves when plain words might fail - I trust that you will hunt happily with "*The Riverine Fox*".

Yours sincerely,

~~Frank Conway~~
Echuca-East
15 June 2012

Enclosure : Submission "FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA"

SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

This Submission addresses recent questions from
the Minister for Water & the Environment

Issues pertinent to the Minister's current theme of "*water sources / water savings / efficient, economical use*" have come to notice lately. These issues demand attention, and are also addressed in this Submission.

FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE & EFFICIENT WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN

" . . . The Riverine Fox in the frost at night
Grows wise - And barks true facts ! . . . "

FJC

Frank Conway

Echuca, Victoria
June 2012

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, a Paper titled "THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN – A COMMENTARY" * was offered to the House of Representatives Committee on Regional Australia. The Paper appeared in the Committee's Internet-published Report.

The Paper's conclusion as to difficulties faced by rural communities remains true, as this excerpt tells:

Excerpt

"Rural communities . . . have no need of water entitlement cuts and further suffering as a consequence of subtle political ambition, combined with academic ignorance and blatant carelessness in water resource management."

PRELIMINARY COMMENT

The "blatant carelessness in water resource management" noted in 2011 continues to be evident today. There remains a pressing need for adequate Federal legislation - *liaison with affected States based upon a draft Bill for a National Water Resources Act* - should be a high priority for the Federal Government. The need is equally great for development of a structured system of management for Australia's geographically vast network of water resources.

Unless and until the present *Water Act* is repealed and replaced by comprehensive Federal law - *a National Water Resources Act* - fragmentary attempts to regulate irrigation water allocation and use will continue. Planning to meet 22nd Century water needs cannot be comprehensive, much less achieve effective outcomes for future generations.

Notwithstanding the piecemeal nature of present endeavours, no offence is intended towards the many dedicated personnel who labour daily for the betterment of irrigators, and the welfare of rural communities generally. These dedicated personnel do not need the various handicaps imposed upon them by the jealous self-interest and petty squabbling engendered by the present *four-State-one-Territory-one-Commonwealth* legislative imbroglio.

PARTICULAR CONCERNS

The following paragraphs address matters of particular concern to the Minister for Water and the Environment in relation to:

- **irrigation infrastructure investment and water purchase**
- **the role of new environmental works in offsetting sustainable diversion limit (SDL) reductions, particularly works proposals identified by State governments and interested communities**
- **sustainable diversion limits (SDL) for Groundwater in the revision of the proposed Basin Plan**

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

Present infrastructure investment programs are well illustrated by Victoria's Murray-Mallee Pipeline project, as well as by intensive initiatives to encourage more effective on-farm irrigation methods.

The Federal Government has a role to play in promoting the usefulness of similar endeavours in other States.

Lateral thinking on a broad scale as regards plant breeding and growth, and re agricultural methods should be fostered, so that best practice is eventually achieved. - For example, vegetable growing, once the province of market gardeners and row cropping is moving progressively towards hydroponic, indoor nurture. Hydroponics has significant beneficial outcomes in reducing the demand for water delivery, (infrastructure), and water use.

WATER PURCHASE

The question of Government purchase ("buy-back") of water entitlements remains vexed and deserves in-depth consultation with interested parties. There are risks that productive irrigated farmland could become wasteland if water entitlements are bought willy-nilly. As noted in "THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN – A COMMENTARY",

Lack of adequate management of water right trading has also seen irrigated, productive land become wholly dependent upon rainfall and more or less unproductive. We now have a situation where on the one hand the sale of water rights has caused productive land to become unproductive. On the other, there is land where the purchased water rights present an accumulation of entitlements far beyond any reasonable need.

Other avenues of securing water to meet environmental flow needs deserve to be explored. Now that the drought years have passed, the increased volume of "environmental flow" in the rivers of the Murray Darling Basin might deliver outcomes, which might minimise the need for water purchase. Further comment concerning water purchase is offered below.

POTENTIAL ROLE OF NEW ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS

New environmental works will generally see savings in water use, or perhaps a more beneficial outcome from the use of a certain volume of water.

There is commonly a good deal of rivalry between district communities, as witness play in the many rural football leagues. The enduring bonds of friendship and competitiveness amongst CWA ladies demonstrate strong community spirit. Hence, there is scope to make water management & conservation a target for inter-community rivalry.

The introduction of Australia Day awards "*for community achievement in water conservation*" - and awarded to communities rather than to individuals - might encourage widespread effort.

The awards could be enhanced by Federal Government sponsorship of attendance at an annual seminar at, say, Canberra University, to allow the interchange of ideas between parliamentary representatives, scientists & researchers, administrative staff, and the rural men and women whose expertise regarding water deserves recognition.

SUSTAINABLE DIVERSION LIMITS (SDL) FOR GROUNDWATER

Groundwater may be seen as a significant resource in some areas. There is a need for sustainable diversion limits (SDL) in the still-being-revised MDBA plan because groundwater has become a finite resource. In the early years of settlement, groundwater was vital . . .

At Ultima, some 30 kilometres west of Swan Hill (and likewise distant from the River Murray) my grandfather was a pioneer. In the early 1900's, he and his sons decided to bore for water using a hand operated auger. After many days, water was found at a depth of ninety feet (about 35 metres). The groundwater was a prized resource then, and should remain so today.

Where practicable, surface water from pipe or channel should be the water of choice because of groundwater's susceptibility to mineral and agricultural chemical contaminants. Groundwater may also absorb chemical effluent from increasingly prevalent mining activity.

NOW FOR SOME LARGER POSSIBILITIES . . .

It is said that "A picture is worth a thousand words". Please now refer to the tripartite diagram illustrating the main rivers of Queensland, NSW, Victoria and S.A. (see two sheets next following Page 7).

With hindsight, and with inspiration from the designers of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, there appears to be ample scope for similar civil engineering works in the Murray Darling basin's extensive river network. Interconnection of some of the many rivers, reservoirs and weirs which form the Murrumbidgee Darling network IS possible. There is also opportunity to use sea water from the Southern Ocean for irrigation. For example, in fruit orchards at Shepparton, Victoria, on rice paddies near Deniliquin, NSW, and in orange groves at Renmark, South Australia.

NEW DAMS AND RESERVOIRS

As detailed in "THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN - A COMMENTARY", plans were drawn by Victoria's *State Rivers & Water Supply Commission* for construction of a dam at Seymour, Victoria which would have provided a reservoir extending some thirty kilometres upstream in the Goulburn river valley, almost reaching the township of Yea.

There are possibilities for other reservoirs in the river valleys above Lake Eildon. The valley of the Jamieson River, for example, is deep and extends many kilometres southward to a high point somewhere near the A.I. Mine Settlement and Gaffney's Creek. The valley road continues, following a different river down to Walhalla in Gippsland, Victoria.

A preliminary survey of the Jamieson River valley as a reservoir site is recommended.

INTERCONNECTOR PIPELINES

There may be advantages gained by directing water from any river by gravity fed pipeline to another river so as to make the water thus drawn more accessible, and also available to achieve environmental flow in an identified locality. Likewise, water could be made available to supplement supplies in a particular irrigation district. Such a district would otherwise remain reliant on existing river flow. Interconnector pipelines could achieve more effective use of Australia's water resources.

Examples

As shown on the accompanying map of the river network, interconnector pipelines could be used to take water from Queensland's Barwon River south to say the headwaters of the Lachlan River in NSW.

Similarly, water from the Darling at Pooncarie could be piped to the Murrumbidgee, and be available to irrigators at Robinvale and Mildura.

These are examples that illustrate infrastructure development opportunities.

LET'S HAVE AN ALL-AUSTRALIAN BLACK ELEPHANT . . .

NOBODY WANTS THE 'WHITE ELEPHANT' AT WONTHAGGI . . .!

The Murray Darling network's biggest reservoir might soon be seen to be the Southern Ocean . . . "Oh no! It's all salty sea water!"

Southern Ocean (Bass Strait) water is not salty at all after passage through Vivtoria's Wonthaggi Desalination Plant. Delivery to the Goulburn-Murray Water Corporation could be readily accomplished. A fine new pipeline runs between Melbourne Water's urban supply system and the River Goulburn near Shepparton in northern Victoria.

Why not make use of this brand new, presently derelict pipeline asset?

A FEW WORDS CONCERNING *CUBBY STATION*

Queensland's *Cubby Station* grew famous for growing cotton.

Lots of cotton - 22,000 hectares of cotton plants thirsty for water from the Murray Darling Basin. Now, one might consider 22,000 hectares to be a large area. It becomes even larger and thirstier given on-farm capacity to store water sufficient for the next two following years !. So, we see 22,000 hectares multiplied by 3 years' worth of irrigation water presenting in effect 66000 hectares under irrigation.

Dear reader, the entire Shepparton Irrigation District covers just 80,000 hectares.

S - o - o - o, the water accessible in one season by one farm in Queensland is in fact sufficient to water 82.5% of, *or in real terms*, the entire Shepparton Irrigation District.

Now, by God's good Grace, world cotton prices have dropped to a point where the cotton barons don't want to grow cotton any more. Are there any buyers for *Cubby Station*?

MATTERS IN LAW . . . AND OUTLAWS

There are, in matters of commercial law, established principles concerning contracts. One such principle relates to contracts which can be shown to be "not in the public interest."

The contract for supply of water to *Cubby Station*, (that is to say, a "water licence") in the vast quantities indicated might well be determined by the High Court to be "a contract which is not in the public interest". The "water licence" contract would therefore lack validity, and be contrary to law.

QUESTIONS FOR THE MINISTER

When will the Minister speak with the Attorney-General about *Cubby Station's* water licence?

Will there be a High Court challenge to deal with the question of the *Cubby Station* water licence?

Will there be appropriate liaison with the affected States concerning a Federal *National Water Resources Act*?

HARK, HARK THE DOGS ARE BARKING,
I CAN NO LONGER STAY . . .

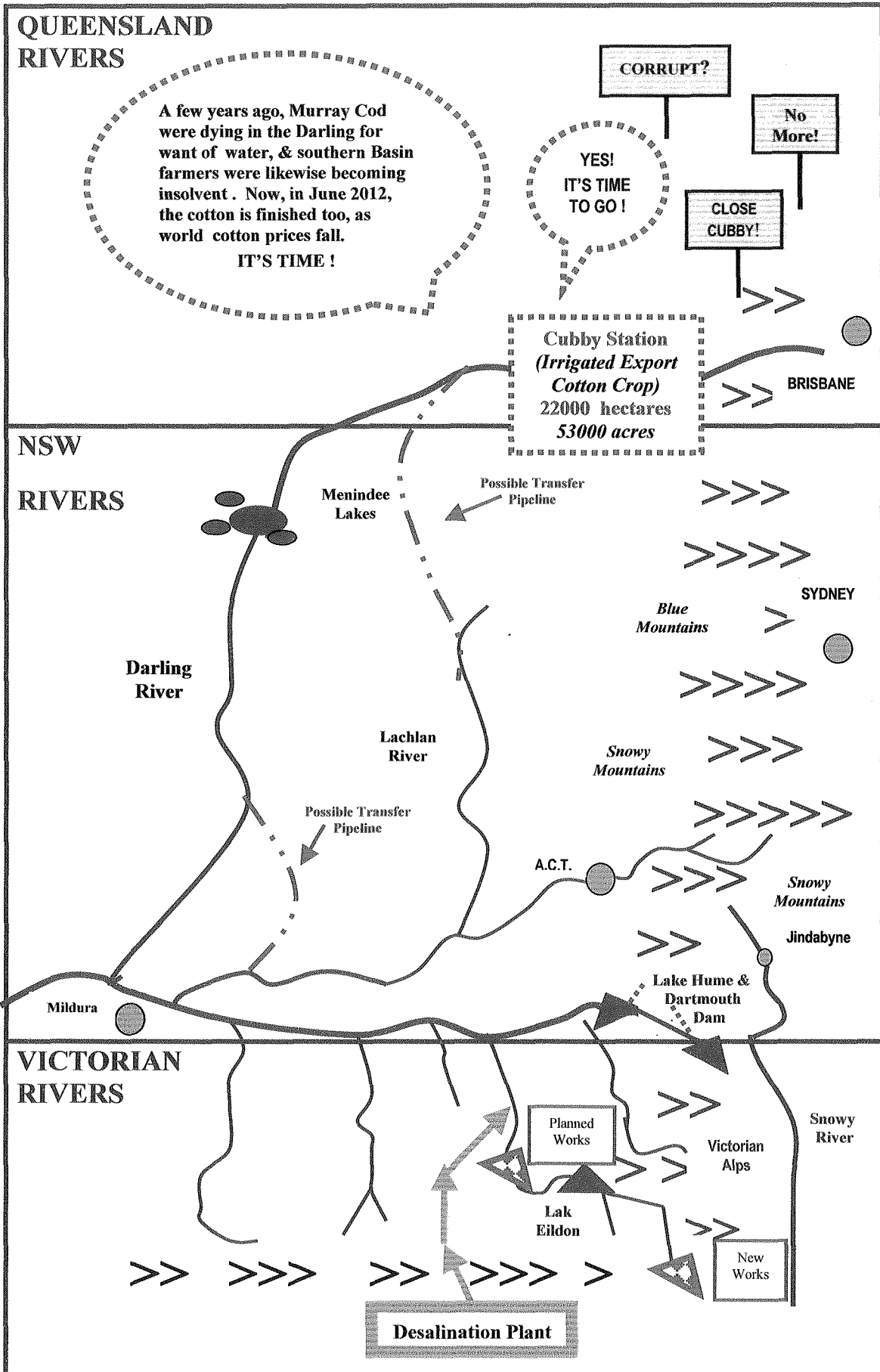
May God continue to sustain the Standing Committee on its journey; may He be pleased to bless Committee Members and Government Ministers with true wisdom.

Frank Conway
Echuca, Victoria
15 January 2012

ENCLOSURES :

1. Maps : THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN
2. Poem : "THE RIVERINE FOX"

THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN



THE RIVERINE FOX

An exposé of Sundry Foxes who lust for money, crave for water, and covet power - They cause great affront

Australians all let us deplore
The Murray Darling Plan
Our golden soil is drying out
Food mightn't be grown at all !

Where lambs once grazed
Foreign rice is raised
"For export" so they say

*Roast Lamb, Mint Sauce
and Vegetables*

Are a luxury nowadays

The cotton baron billionaires
Showing greedy disregard
Take water in abundance
Do they take it from town backyards?

From Adelaide town backyards indeed
From every farm downstream
Are those *Cubby Station* barons
"National Champion" water thieves ?

At Flemington in Sydney Town,
On Melbourne's Footscray Road
The Wholesale Produce Markets trade
In produce freshly grown

The best of fruit, the freshest veg
Not good enough it seems.
For the greedy Supermarket men
Are never at Market seen

The greedy Supermarket men
With 'farm gate' contracts signed
Cart fresh farm crops away to age
In their warehouses, never mind!

Australians all now shout "No more!"
We are no longer free
To choose to eat what's fresh and good
Nature's gift to you and me !

We cannot eat the cotton crop
We could never eat all the rice !
And we're wary of Supermarket men
Making claims about "Fresh & Nice"

A grand Authority has the task
To manage our Nation's water
But there's no effective Act - no Law
Just a farce that drags farmers to
slaughter?

Why is it so? You already know . . .
Our Governments have failed;
Four States and the Commonwealth
Have fostered unjust grails !

The grails of the cotton billionaires
The grail to sell rice abroad.
The grail that is Power to Govern,
These grails bring distress to all !

Now is the time to tell the truth
To listen to facts told clearly . . .
Murrumbidgee & Murray-Goulburn men
Treasure our food supplies dearly

For some foods no longer grow 'at home'
We're becoming 'food import reliant'
Food imports are like foreign-made
Shoes, causing unemployment queues

So let's see Canberra's Parliament
Fast-track a new Bill for an Act
To empower our Federal Government
To govern our Rivers in fact!

Australians today just sadly stare
At farmers who so bravely dare,
At the Basin Chairman who lacks real
power,
At a Government that's not being fair

So there'll be a change of Government,
Less rice, & more Spring lambs to eat,
Fruit growers will have needed water
Cotton barons face world price defeat !

A Vixen holds sway around Capital Hill
Great cunning attends all her acts . . .

The Riverine Fox in the frost of night
Grows wise - And barks true facts !