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11 March 2014.

Committee Secretary,
Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia,
P. O. Box 6021
Parliament House,,
CANBERRA. ACT 2600.

Dear Sir,

Our local member, the Hon. Steven Ciobo, Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, has informed me that interested persons may submit their views and concepts which may help and contribute to the development of the report which must be presented to the Parliament later in the year.

My background may help explain how my views have come about. I grew up in the Central Queensland town of Clermont. While my father had an accounting practice in Clermont, we actually lived on a small property about two and a half miles out of town. We had our own ponies, our own milkers and a number of sheep. When I was rejected from joining the air force in 1945, I went jackerooing on Logan Downs, an 800 square mile property 40 miles north of Clermont. Besides a few hundred horses, there were about 10,000 head of cattle and 70,000 head of sheep. In 1946 I worked for some family friends on a property called Surbiton, about 40 miles north of Alpha. It was a smaller property of about 200 square miles with some 8,000 sheep and about 3,000 cattle. I was there until early 1949 when I returned to help my father whose sight, as a result of World War 1 wound was declining. I had been studying accountancy by correspondence since I left school.

For many, many years I have been firmly of the view that this country, when managed correctly, can be one of the world's greatest producers of food to meet all needs – meat, milk, vegetables, sea foods etc. etc. To produce these things we must have large areas of fertile soil and plenty of water. The soil is there. We must capture, store and move the water to where it is needed.

Following a visit to the Northern Territory and the northern part of Western Australia in 2006, I gave a speech to our PROBUS Club entitled WATERING AUSTRALIA. A copy of that speech is attached.

- The theory behind that speech was that instead of letting massive quantities of fresh water being allowed to flow into the Timor Sea, we could bring it across the Northern Territory into Queensland to virtually maintain a permanent supply of water for the Murray-Darling irrigation system.

My observation of the weather system in the northern part of this country – Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland – is that massive quantities of rain falls each year in the summers but very, very little is captured. A message from the Bureau of Meteorology in Western Australia in 2006 dealing with rainfalls at Kununurra from 1976 to 2006 sets out the actual falls, by month, over that period. On that trip I had in 2006 I was amazed that there were not more dams/lakes like Lake Argyle in that area. I am firmly of the view that the right engineers can design and supervise the building of lakes/dams in this part of Australia that will provide sufficient water to irrigate massive areas of western Queensland and western New South Wales.

If we can get to the stage of growing large quantities of food etc. in this part of the country for the huge markets in China, India and other parts of Asia, that product can be transported overland to train stations in central Australia for conveyance by train – like The Ghan – to Darwin – the closest Australian port to the massive markets in Asia.

The idea to capture water in Queensland and divert it over the Dividing Range is certainly not new. An editorial in the Gold Coast Bulletin dated February 20, 2007 reads “...Dr. J. J. C. Bradfield had the credentials to be taken seriously, even if the technology might not have been there in 1938 to deliver his scheme – which would divert the waters of the upper reaches of the Johnson, Tully, Herbert and Burdekin Rivers west into the Thomson with the ultimate aim of keeping Lake Eyre topped up.....”. In my letter to Senator Ian Macdonald on 28 October, 2009, I made mention of diverting water from the coastal area of eastern Queensland over the Dividing Range for the purpose of irrigation in western Queensland – a copy of that letter is attached.

Apart from what can be done with water in the food production industries, there are other activities that will grow. I am firmly of the view that if rivers in the Northern Territory and Western Queensland can be dammed so that effectively the likes of the Thompson, the Gregory and the Diamantina, which flows into Lake Eyre as Warburton Creek, will become permanent water ways, the tourism industry would bound ahead. Not only Lake Eyre, a massive area but mostly waterless, and the rivers flowing into it, would become a world- wide attraction.

On numerous occasions I have written to politicians – the Prime Minister a few times; to our Federal member Steven Ciobo; to Senator Ian Macdonald; to Senator Sue Boyce - on the subject of water. Let us hope that your Committee can get things moving. Yes, it will take time. Yes, it will cost a lot of money.

When you consider what could very easily happen to this great country if we don't get water into the vast area of land to grow food, not only for our own people, but also to sell to those countries who need it for the millions of their own inhabitants we could very easily go under and a country that really needs food could take us over. A good government that can organize developments along the lines that are the subject of this letter will, I am sure, be in control for some considerable time.

Please let me know if there is anything else I can do.



P. F. J. Needham

cc Hon Steven Ciobo