



Outback Areas Community Development Trust

SUBMISSION NO 48

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Secretary: *[Signature]*

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES
AND FORESTRY

28 August 2002

Mr Ian Dundas
C/o Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Dundas

Submission to Inquiry into future water supplies for Australia's rural industries and communities

The Outback Areas Community Development Trust, which is a statutory authority established in South Australia to assist remote communities in the 80% of this State that is unincorporated, is appreciative of the opportunity of making a submission to this inquiry.

While we understand that the SA State Government will be making its own general submission, it is an indication of the importance of the issue of potable domestic water supplies to the remote communities of South Australia's arid outback, that the Trust resolved unanimously to make its own submission. We would also wish to attend one of the public hearings later this year.

The Terms of Reference appear to be adequate on the assumption that an examination of future programs will also recognise the need for, and cost of, the equitable provision of water to remote communities, and the continuing likelihood that these costs will be considerably greater than those incurred in the more urbanised coastal areas.

We note the intention of looking at the adequacy of scientific research in the context of climate variability. While it is understood that this relates principally to climate change, we believe that many of the communities that we assist have, for years, been adapting to extreme climate variability and to the effect this has on their domestic water supplies. These communities are situated in areas where concepts of average rainfall are almost meaningless and extended periods of years of minimal precipitation are interspersed with episodic rainfall events and flooding.

Leaving aside the communities at Roxby Downs and Coober Pedy which are under local government and have council supplied water systems, the communities the Trust deals with vary in size from 600 people (Andamooka) downward to a handful or a mere skeleton population. These communities reside in areas characterised by 'average' unreliable rainfalls of 250 mm or less and evaporation rates of the order of metres per year.

Community members are prudent and adaptive with their water usage and have of necessity been responsive to demand management programs and suggestions.

In contrast to other parts of South Australia where water consumption has been shown to relate to economic status, the consumption of remote communities has always been related to resource capability.

The domestic water issues that face these communities relate to both quantity and quality with the latter being common throughout the outback.

Towns like Marree and Oodnadatta sit on top of the Great Artesian Basin while Innamincka, limited by the aquifer depths toward the centre of the GAB, derives its water from reasonably reliable water holes in the Cooper, which at that point receive regular freshette flows. And there are some reasonably-supplied fractured rock aquifers in the Central and North Flinders Ranges.

Elsewhere the communities rely on surface catchment or small, shallow local aquifers, most of which contain high levels of minerals and many of which are highly saline. While catchment from roof and ground surface runoffs during episodic rain is usually optimised, the underground supplies are relied on for all but drinking water.

It is in these areas that the Trust is trying to assist communities with innovative solutions and it is in search of relatively inexpensive solutions that we believe considerable further research effort is needed.

The Trust would like to be able to point community progress associations or district planning groups towards reasonable inexpensive solutions which address water quality and quantity and which could involve desalination, water purification, aquifer recharge, transpiration mitigation, waste water recovery and reuse systems.

The Trust is very aware of the need for solutions which take into account the total water cycle, particularly where quantity of water is the issue.

Programs are needed that provide tangible encouragement and resources for further investigations - and on-ground pilot installations - of water supply and treatment systems. The end products need to be affordable systems that will be relevant to single households and small communities in the arid areas. This should have a very high priority.

Yours sincerely



Bill McIntosh
Chairman
OACDT