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Senator Ian Macdonald,
P. O. Box 2185,
Townsville. Qld. 4810.

Dear Senator,

Thank you for having me on your mailing list. I appreciate the regular receipt of your Northern Opinion *Online*.

There is no doubt that the world's climate is changing, but how much is the result of carbon emissions, and how much is in the course of nature – a factor that has been evident since time began. There is no way that man can change the course of nature.

What percentage of the total global warming is the result of industry in Australia? I have heard it is less than 2%. What impact will a reduction of 20% by Australia have on the world wide problem? We certainly cannot ignore the problem, but I am of the view that there are much more important problems in this country to be resolved before 2020.

The other day I heard Wayne Swan down grading Malcolm Turnbull by saying that his Treasury officials had found a \$3.2 billion black hole in the ETS put forward by the Leader of the Opposition. Would the treasurer be good enough to provide Mr. Turnbull with the analysis carried out by his people so that Mr. Turnbull's consultants could see how this "black hole" had come about? I wouldn't hold my breath.

You have asked that we drop you a note if we believe there are issues that the Federal Opposition should be investigating.

I have raised this matter before, and I will keep pressing it as long as I am on this earth... And that is water. There are two things which are critical to man's survival...and they are air and water.

I believe you have a copy of my initial proposal that the surplus water flowing from Lake Argyle should be diverted by pipeline to the Warrego River near Charleville. If the bulk of the water that now flows into the Timor Sea were to be diverted and arrived by pipeline to the Warrego,

which joins with the Culgoa just south of Bourke and then forms the Darling River, the Murray/Darling System would have a permanent source of water. Agricultural production in Queensland would benefit, but more particularly would that be the case in New South Wales. Victoria and South Australia would also be better off. I am sure Lake Alexandrina could possibly regain its old status.

An article in a recent *Weekend Financial Review* I found very interesting. It read:-

“Over the next 40 years, the world’s population is expected to increase by 50% to a little more than 9 billion people. At the same time, available agricultural land is expected to remain static as the opening up of vast new tracts in South America and eastern Europe fails to compensate for the rapid pace of urbanization.

Rising incomes will also supercharge agriculture as they have historically increased demand for protein. By 2050 this changed diet -- more red meat, chicken, fish and dairy -- will demand a doubling of global food production.”

If we had water in the right places there are vast tracts of land in eastern Australia which could be developed to benefit from this expected massive increase in mouths to be fed.

It is forecast that projected Chinese demand for agricultural products by 2020 will increase...
by 43% to over 10,000 tonnes for beef,
by 36% to 15,000 tonnes for chicken,
by 65% to over 35,000 tonnes for fresh milk, and
by 23% to nearly 70,000 tonnes for pork.

I am sure demand for these products and other agricultural products for India and Europe will also increase.

The question that we must consider then is “What can we in Australia do to benefit from this anticipated increase in demand”. All economists will, I am sure, support the concept that any person, any company, any country, should exploit its comparative advantage in any field in which it operates. Australia’s comparative advantage is in agriculture. We have the resources to do this – land and water. What we have to do, is to bring these two things together.

I have already mentioned water coming from the Kimberley region in Western Australia where we have a Liberal Government. The next consideration is the diversion of water from the rivers that flow into the Gulf of Carpentaria – principally the Flinders and the Leichhardt – across the mountains into the Thompson, the Diamantina and the Gregory rivers. I lived in Hughenden for some time and have seen the Flinders in flood. A well designed scheme would see water stored in such a way that these rivers would provide the necessary water for extensive irrigation in the Channel Country and in other areas of western Queensland.

Just before the last state election I suggested to our local candidate Ros Bates and also to John Paul Longbroek that we should look into the possibility of building dams in the gorges of the Great Dividing Range in North Queensland for a number of purposes. Firstly in an attempt to control floods, secondly to divert that water through pipelines and which could then drive turbines to generate electricity (less expensive electricity, reduced green house gas emissions and the water is still there to be used as water) and thirdly there is the possibility that the water could be diverted over the ranges to western Queensland.

To many people today, such schemes may seem massive, but you will find that a Chinese engineer by the name of Li Bing, in the Qin dynasty, "created a monster irrigation project on the Min River 2,300 years ago; astonishingly, it still stands". *

Yes, such projects will take some time to survey, design and construct. It would also cost a lot of money - a massive amount of money. But we must look into the future. If we don't do it, there are other people in the world who will figure out ways to get into Australia and do it. We and our descendants will then be "has beens". Take for example the foreign deals in 2009 which include-

Sinochem's takeover of Nufarm \$2.8bn

Viterra's takeover of ABB Grain \$1.6bn

Terra Firma's takeover of Consolidated Pastoral \$425m

IFFCO's 20% stake in AAco \$85m

While agricultural development may be the major project resulting from the harvesting and storage of water, there are other projects which should not be overlooked.

Water in Lake Eyre has been a major tourist attraction in recent times. What would it be like if Lake Eyre, which covers an area of 9,500 square kilometers, had water in it permanently? Decentralization of the population, tourism, fishing and lots of other industries would grow from such a scheme.

If I can do nothing more than get the powers that be to discuss and evaluate these weird ideas, I will feel that I will have contributed something.

A copy of this letter is being sent to our local member, Steven Ciobo, and to Christopher Pyne, a man for whom I have a high regard

Hope to hear from you in due course,

Sincerely,

Patrick Needham

* See page 110 of the book by Simon Winchester **Bomb, Book, Compass. Joseph Needham and the Great Secrets of China.**