

SUBMISSION NO. 163

Secretary: *Blair*

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4 AUG 2003

SUBMISSION TO STANDING COMMITTEE
ON AGRICULTURAL FISHERIES & FORESTRIES

INQUIRY INTO FUTURE WATER SUPPLIES FOR AUSTRALIA'S
RURAL INDUSTRIES AND COMMUNITIES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES
AND FORESTRY

Wentworth Shire Council ~ "The Quantity of Water Should Not Be Constrained
It Falleth as Rain from the Heavens"
(with apologies to Bill SI)

At least it should in these dry areas but that it does not is a reason why my Council believes that there needs to be a National approach to water and the only Government who can carry that out is the Commonwealth.

- Wentworth Shire Council believes that the Water Act should be a National Water Act and that the regulatory provisions should be a National Overview of all water regulations within Australia. However the Council believes that the controls on water should be enacted at the regional level to allow for differences in regions and would reflect the way in which communities operate and also the industries within those regions. My Council believes that this one proposal would go most of the way to solving most of the problems perceived with water and the different regulatory functions of the States and would assure most communities within Australia of their future water supplies.
- Commonwealth Policies and Programs –
 - Irrigation practices. The Council believes that there needs to be regulation of irrigation practices so that horticulturalists and irrigators utilise low level sprinklers and drip systems which are economical and efficiently deliver water to the irrigated crop. We believe that the use of open channels, flood irrigation and other uneconomical practices should cease as soon as possible and that there should be incentives to ensure that that happens as soon as possible.
 - Water Savings. The Council believes that any savings from the use of better irrigation practices and any other measures taken to increase water must go to environmental flows and not go to additional irrigation. My Council has seen various instances where channels

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have been pipelined and where more effective methods of irrigation have produced water savings for the irrigation supplied by them and those savings are then put to additional irrigation which merely compounds the problem. The Council also is of the opinion that water not used and carried over to the next year must take into account evaporation loss. Some system must be devised to take these losses into account or the amount of water carried over may not necessarily be there.

- Dams. The Council believes that additional water storages are vital and essential for the stability, storage and supply of water for domestic consumption and for other purposes throughout the whole of Australia. We doubt that there is any reason why anyone would object to additional water storages being made available because in some senses those additional water storages would act to drought proof the cities and towns which depend very much upon a regular reliable supply of water. In a similar view, the Council believes that the existing underground aquifers should be replenished and used as a storage system.

- Multi-Nationals. The Council believes that multi-nationals should be stopped or reduced in their farming efforts. Multi-nationals tend to be active traders of water and the Council believes very much that water must be tied to the land and we also believe that multi-nationals tend not to be good regional community citizens but are merely bottom line driven without considering the effect on the total community. We therefore believe that the Government should look at the family farm or co-operatives but that multi-nationals should not play any part in active irrigated horticulture. The Council also believes that tax incentives (i.e. depreciation) should not be available to multi nationals because of similar concerns to those outlined above.

- Salinity. The Council believes that the three irrigation States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia should come under one Salinity Plan rather than a Salinity Plan for each State. My Council is in the border area of three States and we see the ludicrous situation occur from time to time where

issues of State Sovereignty sometimes take over from plain commonsense. The Council therefore believes that there should be a Common Salinity Plan covering Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales and that Salinity Plan should be agreed by the three States and managed by a Tri-State Committee, overseen by the Commonwealth.

- Rivers. The Council believes that rivers have to be environmentally and *economically* sustainable. To have one without the other begs the question what exactly are we trying to do. The Council believes very much in environmental flows, given what we have stated earlier in our submission that water savings must go to environmental flows and not additional irrigations, but we also believe that being realists, rivers must be economically sustainable otherwise we lose the whole effect of environmental flows.
- Water plans. The Council is of the view that the proposal put forward by a former Western Australian Politician, Ernie Bridges in turning back some of the rivers in northern Western Australia and in the Northern Territory should be given serious consideration from an environmental and economical point of view. The Council does not believe that turning back of rivers in the Kimberly has the same effect as for example turning back the Clarence or could even create problems that were previously created by the Snowy River. We believe that the turning back of those rivers should be given serious consideration due to the environmental and economical benefit to Australia as a whole as well as its assisting drought proofing the country.
- Towns. The Council believes that there should be decent water supplies for all towns along all rivers and we believe that some of the matters we have raised above would assist in making sure that rivers were in fact able to provide decent potable water supplies for villages and towns along them. In particular my Council supports a proper weir for the Pooncarie township to enable the residents of the town to have the normal right that one would expect of access to potable water. At the present stage the township is existing on water trucked to Pooncarie and that itself is not conducive to the general well-being of the community and reflects badly the way in which

water management has been used in the Menindee Lakes area and in the States generally.

- Water restrictions. The Council believes that in line with all the other aspects raised above, water restrictions and water wise programs should be compulsory, be year round and should be National rather than regional State or otherwise. Water restrictions are a sensible commonsense option which would allow all of the communities around Australia to be careful about the use of water. The educational concept behind the water wise campaigns as well as a combination of water restrictions on a National basis would have far reaching effects in relation to the stability and supply of water for domestic consumption and other purposes.

“The Effect of Commonwealth Policies and Programs”

- Moratorium. The Council believes there should be a moratorium on large scale horticultural plantings because of the effect that those types of plantings have on the available local water supply. Most of these large scale operations are carried out by multi-nationals, and our views on them are outlined above. We believe strongly in the small farmer and we believe that there needs to be an enormous amount of consideration given to the small farmer and if there was a moratorium on large scale horticultural plantings then that would have a beneficial effect on current and future water use in rural Australia.

“Commonwealth Policies and Programs – Competing Demands on Water Resources”

- The Small Landholder. As stated above the Council believes very much in the protection of the small landholder. As most Government agencies and Government Departments now concentrate on the small business sector, we believe that the small landholder is the rural small business sector, and there needs to be a protection and a valuation of the small landholder. Without the small landholder the growth of regions and country towns would not occur and if there were to be large scale multi-national horticultural plantings the growth and development of country towns infrastructure

would be lessened. We therefore believe that there needs to be programs and policies which would ensure that the small landholders are protected. While stating that we need to protect the small landholder, the Council also believes that small landholders and people coming from outside the industry need to have a qualification or need to satisfy the irrigation authorities that they can handle the horticultural property which they have purchased. For example someone seeking a "sea change" comes from Melbourne buying and wasting water because they are not aware of how the land is to be managed. We therefore believe that if that is to happen and if country towns are to grow and prosper, we need the infusion of new blood – but that new blood must be able to be aware of current horticultural practices and irrigation practices to enable water to be used wisely and efficiently.

- Trading. The Council believes that water must be able to be traded but that it must be traded within its own river systems and its own river valleys. We do not believe for example that water can be traded from one State to another or that water can be traded between the Darling River and the Murrumbidgee River – we believe that water needs to have some restrictions to ensure that water in river systems remain within those river systems.
- Unsuitable land. We believe that there should be a process of retiring land which is unsuitable for horticultural production. For example some of the land around Kerang and those areas is badly salt affected and we believe that there needs to be some consideration given to measuring whether the land can support horticultural production and if it cannot then it needs to be retired and the landholder given the option of being bought out or transferring to another suitable farm.
- Low Security Water. The Council believes that low security water should only be available in years of high flow. To have low security water in times of drought or in times of severe stress upon rivers seems to us to be absolutely ludicrous and it appears to be plain common sense to have low security water only available in years of high flows.
- Subsidisation. The Council is aware that in various states of Australia that farmers now have to license or pay for the water collected in their on-farm

storages and dams. We believe that to encourage farmers to more efficiently and effectively use the water in their dams, farmers within the States should be subsidised by the States to purchase evaporation mats which would reduce the amount of evaporation lost to the atmosphere.

- Salinity. We believe that water from all salinity interception points along all the rivers should be captured, desalinated and put back into the river on site. We do not believe there is any reason why the water which is intercepted at salinity points should be transferred out to evaporation basins which merely ensure that land around the basins has an accumulation of salt which makes the land around it unable to be used for horticultural or farming purposes. We believe that desalinisation is one of the ways in which the balance of competing demands on water resources could be met. In the same way the Council believes that all irrigation channels must be pipelined. We do not believe that in this day and age to have open channels is economic, efficient or even desirable and we believe that there should be urgent consideration given to pipelining all open channels within the Australian landscape.
- Licenses. The Council is aware that some opportunistic licenses are used from time to time. We believe that those opportunistic licenses need to be reviewed realistically. To have opportunistic licenses in times of very high flow seems to be reasonable but the Council feels that there should be more review of those licenses than is currently happening. The Council is also concerned that new water licenses are issued. We do not believe any further water licenses should be issued. Water is a finite resource.

The Council believes that the Darling Anabranh Management Plan to pipeline the Anabranh should be supported by the Commonwealth Government and the Council would support any effort by the local community to resolve its own problems with relation to the Anabranh supply of water.

- Rainwater Tanks. The Council believes there should be incentives Australia wide for rainwater tanks to be provided across every residence in Australia. As well as the points we raised earlier in this submission about water wise and water restrictions being enforced, we believe that the Government and State Governments should provide subsidies for rainwater tanks to be

compulsory in regional towns and cities across regional Australia and also should be able to be used in capital cities as well as the country towns.

“Scientific Research”

The Council believes that most important scientific research which would enable the reliability of water, should be targeted towards desalination. The Council believes that there should be a greater effort by the Commonwealth Government to encourage research and development of desalination plants because of the importance of water to the driest continent in the world, Australia. We are aware that desalination currently works within the middle eastern countries and there seems to be no reason why the Australian Government should not be able to carry out the same sort of research to that already being done overseas. We cannot stress enough the importance my Council puts on the issue of desalination as one method by which water can be increased within the Australian landscape.