

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 2010-11
20 October 2010

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION

TOPIC: Ovens Catchment (Victoria)

REFERENCE: Written Question – Senator Colbeck

QUESTION NO: SI-59

1. Why – on the basis of your research – is a cut to irrigators in the Ovens catchment of effectively 71% (or 10GL out of 14GL) being raised when this will all but bring to an end irrigation in the Ovens and King valleys and make them useless for production purposes?
2. What value does 10GL add to the Murray system over and above the 1708GL the Ovens system already provides when the local cost to irrigation is considered?
3. What does it say about promoting water efficiency when the catchment closest to the source is virtually denied irrigation to the benefit of other less efficient areas and at a time when food production is being actively expanded and supported in the area?
4. By removing a further 10GL from the Ovens system, what flexibility does it leave the catchment to respond to new or changing agricultural needs?
5. Noeline Franklin, a former scientist with 16 years' experience at the CSIRO, has suggested that changes to High Country land management policies may have resulted in a loss of water run-off into the Murray-Darling Basin of up 700GL. Has there been any research conducted on the impact of recent changes to High Country land management policies on water run-off into the Murray-Darling Basin? If so, what are the findings?

ANSWER

1. Decisions on the Sustainable Diversion Limits or any other potential cuts to irrigators (or other users) are made by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) not CSIRO. Science is but one input used by the MDBA in making such decisions.
2. The 10 GL is, proportionally, a small contribution to the environmental water requirements of the Murray. From a biophysical view this 10 GL could be provided from elsewhere across the connected river system. CSIRO has not done the necessary analysis to comment on the social and economic perspective.
3. Decision on how to source additional environmental water is a matter for the MDBA.
4. CSIRO has not done the necessary analysis to provide an answer to this question. However, CSIRO's understanding is that under the proposed Basin Plan arrangements water trade would allow these reductions in water use in the Ovens to be reversed.
5. CSIRO has not done any research into the impact of recent changes to High Country land management policies.