

**SUGARLOAF INTERCONNECTOR PIPELINE PROJECT, ADVSORY COMMITTEE
HEARINGS. CHATEAU YERING.**

PRESENTATION BY DR MALCOLM CALDER, on behalf of the YARRA GLEN AND
DISTRICT, TOWNSHIP GROUP INC. 10/04/08

My name is Malcolm Calder. I am President of the Yarra Glen and District Township Group. My wife and I own the property, the western boundary of which coincides with the non-preferred alignment, G3

I have a Master of Science in Botany and a Ph.D. in Rural Science and at retirement I was Associate Professor of Botany and Head of the School of Botany at The University of Melbourne.

During my professional life I was a Member of the **Victorian Land Conservation Council**; Chairman of the **Flora and Fauna Guarantee, Scientific Advisory Committee**; Chairman of the **National Parks Advisory Council**; and a Member of the **Upper Yarra and Dandenong Ranges, Regional Planning Authority**. After retirement I was appointed Chair of the **Yarra Catchment Committee within the Port Philip and Westernport CMA**.

Awards include:- The Australian Natural History Medallion; Parks Victoria “Kookaburra Award” for service to National Parks; and Community Leader of the Year, 2006, by the Shire of Yarra Ranges.

Introduction.

The submission and this presentation have been made on behalf of the Yarra Glen and District Township Group, an elected body representing the whole community.

As indicated in our submission, we are totally opposed to the project and we have outlined the principles on which this opposition is based. As a recognised Community leader in the Shire, I am considered to have the ability to look at and be involved in issues more broadly than my immediate local area, and to be able to assess issues “for the greater good” Our group’s opposition goes well beyond the “not in my back yard” argument, but relates to the questions of responsible water management; the plight of the Goulburn/Murray region; and the lack of sound evidence that the so called water savings of 225 billion litres can be made. In contrast to the views of the Minister for Planning, we consider that the environmental effects will be massive in the short term and will continue to impact the community for many years to come. We submit that the project should be abandoned.

Never the less, we realise that the project is Government Policy and that the Government has the power to implement even discredited policy such as this. It is not my intention to go over the details we have included in our submission, but to highlight one or two matters we wish to emphasise.

Context of this Investigation.

The Sugarloaf Interconnector Project is part of the Victorian Government’s Water Plan “Our Water Our Future”. History shows that all Victorian Governments have taken seriously the need to meet

the water requirements of Melbourne. The Brumby Government is no different. However, it is our contention that the Government has not adequately considered other alternatives for Melbourne. One of the roles of the Yarra Catchment Committee was to work with Melbourne Water on issues of water conservation and management and we recognised several ways in which water management could be achieved within the greater Melbourne region. Melbourne has reduced its per capita use of water from 423 lit / day in the '90's to 331 lit/day in 205/206 and with a target of 296 l/day in 2020. Gains in water efficiency can be made with education and pricing, with recycling and with better management of storm water. However, total water consumption increases with population growth.

A major failure in this consideration of the Sugarloaf Interconnector Project is a rigorous consideration of other possible alternatives for Melbourne's water. James Viggers is a member of the Yarra Glen and District Township Group, a fully qualified Civil Engineer and former employee of Melbourne Water. Before retirement he was Manager, Water Supply and Distribution and in 1998 was appointed by the Department of Finance and Treasury to report on Melbourne Water. In support of our case we are attaching a brief report prepared by Mr Viggers entitled "Water Supply Options for Melbourne".

The Goulburn River and the Food Bowl.

The Goulburn is a Heritage River under the Heritage River Act, therefore water must not be extracted if it has identified effects on flows. Clearly, the removal of 75 billion litres of water is an identified effect on flow below the offtake.

The Sugarloaf Interconnector Pipeline Project has been presented to the people of Victoria as a component of the upgrading of the irrigation infrastructure of Victoria's Food Bowl. On the basis of what we consider to be inadequate research, it is claimed that 225 billion litres of water will be extracted from the food bowl and distributed in the proportion of 1/3 to Melbourne, 1/3 to food bowl irrigators and 1/3 to the environment. We heard yesterday from Mr Meacher about the credibility of this claim. However, not one drop of the water saved in this upgrade will actually be transferred to Melbourne. Melbourne's third will be removed well upstream from the Goulburn weir and will be taken from an already parched catchment. The attached map illustrates the point. The water destined for Melbourne will come essentially from the Eildon catchment. Currently Eildon is only 15% of capacity and the pipeline will reduce the annual flow of the Goulburn below the off take from between 12 and 15%. This project is essentially an additional allocation of water from the Goulburn. Only more rain can contribute to this source.

Information in the Report.

In looking through this PIA Report we have come across a number of factual errors. For instance, regarding motor vehicle accidents between the Healesville – Kinglake road and Brocks Spur on the Melba Highway, the Report says that between 1 Jan, '01 and 31 Dec. 05 "latest data available" there were 7 single vehicle casualty accidents and 1 head-on crash; 8 in five years. However, data from Dixons Creek Emergency Services (C.F.A.) record a total of 4 casualty accidents in 2001 and 6 casualty accidents in 2002; 10 in two years; and they turned out to 16 accidents in 2003; 14 in 2004 and 10 in 2005. Their more recent information shows 14 in 2006 and 6 in 2007. Clearly, the data presented in the Report are incorrect and are not up to date. This raises questions as to the reliability of other data.

We have noted in our submission that some of the properties presented in Appendix K have been misclassified. For instance, a horse agistment farm on Steels Creek Road, has been classified as a tourist attraction, and we wonder why major cattle and beef farms have not been classed as businesses. The location of the Dixons Creek Primary School needs to be corrected. And finally, the map of Section G of Appendix D seems to suggest that there are several roads crossing between the Melba Highway and Steels Creek Road. At least two of these roads don't go through and while these do not in any way impact on the project, they do suggest a lack of attention to detail. Again in these examples, the Report is either inaccurate or inadequate.

Our conclusion from these examples is that the report could be seen, at least in part, as misleading if not wrong. The Commonwealth Minister for the Environment has decided to accredit this PIA process. Under section 87/4 of the EPBC Act he may decide on an accredited assessment if he believes:

- a. it will ensure that all the relevant impacts of the action are adequately assessed; and
- b. that he will receive a report of the outcome of the process that will provide enough information on the relevant impacts of the action to let him make an "informed decision" whether or not to approve the action.

We contend that it is not ready to submit to a Minister, State or Federal, to make an **informed** decision.

State of the investigation.

Considering the Report and hearing the Alliance's presentation on Flora and Fauna, it is clear that this project is a work-in-progress. We are impressed with the biodiversity information so far gathered, but further work is necessary for an adequate assessment to be made. Since the report was presented three more Ecological Vegetation Communities (E.V.C's) have been identified. Any worth-while botanical survey requires at least a full year and preferably two years to complete because of the seasonality of growth and flowering of the component plants. EVC's are characterised by the component species and their characteristic growth forms (Trees, shrubs, grasses and herbs etc.). The fact that these three new EVC's have been identified since the preparation of the PIA suggests to me that more work is necessary. Further, the botanical consultants for the Alliance have themselves said that the identification of some important plants must wait until the next flowering season.

Other examples of yet to be completed work have emerged during the various presentations to this Panel, particularly in the area of Social and Economic. In other words, the Report is not yet finalised, yet we as a community are supposed to respond. It is like judging the quality of a fruit cake before the fruit has been added. No Minister can be asked to make an informed judgement on this pipeline project in the present circumstances. More time, better presentation and more detail is required.

Due process and Communication.

In our submission we are critical of the level of community consultation and publicity given to this project. Yesterday the Alliance provided information on the number of public information sessions and the various meetings which had been held. Often these were publicised at very short notice, and more often than not the sessions were manned by field staff and technical consultants who were not in a position to answer some of the more policy related questions. I can't recall any directors, politicians or political advisors at these meetings. The community has not been treated as a partner in this process.

During the course of this hearing we have been informed on the failure of due process and our Township Group is aware of other examples. Personally I can attest to this. Our property fronts on to Pinnacle Lane and our western boundary follows the non-preferred alignment of G3 in the Steels Creek Valley. To date neither my wife nor I have been contacted by any member of the Alliance or the field teams, and as far as we know, no one from the Alliance has been on our land. We did not receive a copy of the original “Blue Book” and as far as I know our property has not been given an identity number. This is not an ingenious assertion, it is a statement of fact. Yet this Committee and the Ministers who will receive their advice, will make a judgement as to how G3 compares with other options in order to recommend a final alignment. I suggest that in the present circumstances, no such judgement can be made.

Conclusion.

Our conclusion is clear. This Report is not yet ready for assessment. Errors need to be corrected, more data needs to be collected, and there needs to be greater attention to detail. The responsible Ministers at both State and Federal level should not be being asked to make informed judgements on the project. As a community we should require the highest standards of research and presentation when such large sums of public money are to be spent on a project with such massive environmental, social and economic impacts.

Ideally the Sugarloaf Interconnector Pipeline Project should be abandoned. It is ill-conceived, inadequately researched and poorly presented. Further, there are examples of where due process has not been followed. We note that the State Auditor General is also critical of the consultative processes and the lack of adequate economic analysis of the project.

Malcolm Calder
On behalf of Yarra Glen and District