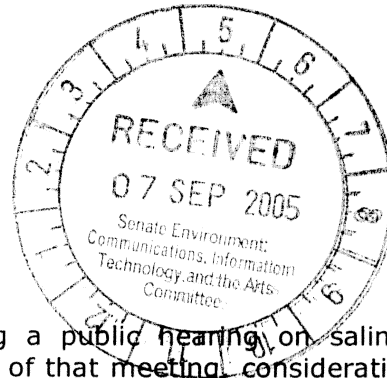


Monday, September 5th, 2005

Ms Louise Gell
Secretary
Senate Environment, Communications,
Information Technology & The Arts Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Ms Gell,

I understand that the above Committee is holding a public hearing on salinity, in Canberra on Tuesday night next and that as a result of that meeting, consideration will be given to what areas in the country the Committee might visit.

Your Committee will be aware of the problem of salinity in the Upper South East of South Australia, that an Environmental Impact Study was held and its results published in 1993, with a Supplement sometime later, which enabled landholders and interested persons to give their reactions to the proposals in the E.I.S.

The E.I.S. divided the Upper South East into three regions — Northern, Central and Southern. It is only in the Central region that drains recommended in the E.I.S. have not been completed.

My concern is with what is called the proposed Didicoolum Drain. It is planned to stretch from the end of Drain E through six properties, to link up with a private drain dug by an individual landholder, Mr Tom Brinkworth, through his Didicoolum and other properties. This 1.6m deep drain will be close to one of the few remaining watercourses in the South East of South Australia.

Drains along the Marcollat Flat were, I think, shown on all versions of the E.I.S. That was thirteen years ago.

The Marcollat Flat has two distinguishing features. It has the watercourse and a very productive late-carrying flat in the Kyeema, Marcollat and Minnamurra properties, which have calcerous rather than clayey soils.

I question whether sufficient work has been done, or consideration given to the effects of the proposed drain on either the Marcollat Watercourse to which it will be in close proximity, or the productive flat in which it will sit.

The Upper South East Dryland Salinity and Flood Mitigation Program appear to be committed irretrievably to the concept of a deep drain. This is understandable as a drain was proposed in the E.I.S. in 1993 and there is support for it. However, in the supplement to the E.I.S., amongst those who opposed a drain were Mr Hedley Prosser of Kyeema and Mr Max Verco of Marcollat. Both men are now dead. Mr Verco had lived in the district for over 65 years at the time of his death.

The U.S.E.D.S. & R.M. program called a meeting of landholders on 26th November, 2005 to discuss the proposal for a drain. This was followed by a letter from the Program Director to landholders on 7th January, 2004, listing eight options which were to be considered and worked through. The first of these was to do nothing, the other seven proposed alternative routes for a deep drain.

I must point out that the "to do nothing" option should imply to do nothing about digging a deep drain, but to do all that can possibly be done to solve the problem in other ways.

The next meeting of landholders took place some seventeen months later, on 4th May, 2005. At this meeting, landholders were presented with a "preferred option" for a 1.6m deep drain. The presentation took the whole meeting. There was no opportunity for discussion, either of the drain or three Investigative Reports which had been produced in the September 2004 and to which landholders had been asked to respond. In a letter to landholders on 7th September, 2004, Mr Roger Wickes, the Chair and Sponsor of the U.S.E. Program Board, wrote "the U.S.E. program also accepts that the debate regarding the need for drainage has transpired in previous work." The previous work referred to could only have been the E.I.S. published twelve years previously.

It appears that the option not to dig a deep drain has not been given any real consideration by the U.S.E. Program people and that arguments against the drain have not been revisited.

I do realise that under the Upper South East Dryland Salinity and Flood Management Act (December 2002), the U.S.E. Program had the power to dig the drain regardless.

At the meeting on 7th May, it was stated by the U.S.E. Infrastructure Development Manager, that if landholders could not agree (I presume with the recommendation made to him by the U.S.E. Program Board), then the Minister himself would decide. Subsequently, landholders were invited to write either to the Program Director or to the Minister concerned, The Honourable John Hill, Minister for Environment and Conservation.

In my opinion, the secret to the functioning of both the agricultural and the wetlands, is to allow the water to flow across it at its natural speed — slowly and over a wide area. In other words, don't hold it up with artificial barriers and don't try to hurry it along by lowering the natural sill levels in the watercourse, increasing the natural speed and compressing water into a smaller, deeper faster-flowing framework. This is eventually disastrous for the watercourse and the flat with their native scrub, grasses, trees and pastures.

Therefore, in my letter to the Minister of 15th August, I asked the following questions:

- ❖ Has every alternative to digging this drain been thoroughly explored?
- ❖ Are we embarking on a plan put forward in the E.I.S. in 1992, which thirteen years later, with changed conditions and different ways of coping with problems, is inappropriate?
- ❖ Is there a mind-set within the U.S.E. Program Board, that sees a drain, an engineering solution, as the only way to achieve 'regional natural resource management objects' (U.S.E. Program's words) in this particular instance?
- ❖ Has Option 1 (not digging a drain) been really carefully looked at?

I realise I am asking the same question in four different ways.

The Minister, Mr John Hill, visited the area on Wednesday, 16th August, talked to landholders, looked at the landscape.

The Environment Resource Development Committee of the South Australian Parliament who, on their own admission, don't know very much about the issues involved, are to familiarise themselves with the situation on Monday, September 5th.

With such exposure to this particular problem, it may be questioned why I should be writing to this Senate Committee, particularly as the Federal Government is a major source of funding of this particular program.

- ❖ Your Committee I imagine will receive reported research and experience in handling dryland salinity, by keeping the water in the landscape, rather than sending it away in a deep drain. If so, such information needs to be passed on promptly to the U.S.E. Program and to the relevant landholders.
- ❖ There is the question of the most effective use of money. Do N.A.P. funds have to be spent by 30/06/06?
- ❖ In the longer term, once this drain goes in, it will change the landscape and the flow pattern of the Marcollat forever.

With thanks.

Yours sincerely,

(W. HAYWARD)

P.S. My wife's family took up land on the Marcollat Watercourse in the early 1950's. She has remained a landholder in the district since. I have been her partner in this since 1956.

I was the founding Chairman of the Marcollat Watercourse Management Group Inc. which met twenty-six times under my chairmanship between 1997 and March 2003.