

DARLING RIVER



FOOD AND FIBRE

3 February 2004

Mr Steve Goudie
Condamine & Balonne Water Resource Planning
Department of Natural Resources and Mines
PO Box 318
Toowoomba Q 4350

Facsimile: 07 4688 1478

Dear Mr Goudie

I refer to our telephone conversation yesterday regarding the deadline for submissions to the Condamine and Balonne Draft Water Resource Plan.

Since the plan was released late last year there has been considerable concern about a number of features of the plan in the downstream area of the river system, and in the Bourke region which receives the "end-of-system" flows of the Condamine & Balonne Rivers.

Some of our major concerns are as follows:

1. The Darling River historically receives over 20% of its flows from the Condamine and Balonne system. The present plan seems to have been framed without regard to the Darling River, and the impacts of further growth in extractions. The plan does not address water sharing issues with downstream users on the Darling River.
2. Although Peter Cullen's Scientific Review Panel identified the Darling River as one of the four important ecological assets, there is nothing practical in the draft-sharing plan that addresses flow issues into the Darling River itself. There are provisions for Narran Lakes, the Culgoa floodplain etc, but nothing specifically designed to protect flows into the Darling River. This is of particular concern for the environmental, economic, social and cultural values of the lower Culgoa system and the Darling River.
3. There has been no input sought from the Bourke region on the impacts of the Condamine & Balonne Draft Water Sharing Plan. No representative was sought from the bottom of the system by the department of Natural Resources and Mines, nor the committee. No consultation has taken place here at the end of the system. We maintain that this is a gross oversight by the department, the water sharing committee and the facilitator Mrs Leith Bouilly. Mrs Bouilly apologised and admitted this at the meeting in Brewarrina last year.

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This acknowledgment of the lack of input from the "end-of-the-system" perspective, now need to be followed up with input from people in the Bourke and Brewarrina districts.

4. There appears to be no set limits to water extractions from the system. No cap limits have been set, and there are no volumetric conversion numbers available in the report. It appears that the effective upper limit cap on this system is proposed to be 1.2 million megalitres. Given that the bottom of the system is a series of ephemeral streams, this amount of extraction is of great concern to downstream communities.

Steve – we have not really had the time available to properly assess these concerns. Therefore we would appreciate your offer for departmental representatives to come to Bourke to brief local government, irrigation and community representatives on the implications of this draft plan. We would also appreciate the opportunity to be briefed by Professor Peter Cullen.

Our request is that you allow this briefing in Bourke early in 2004, and that the timetable for submissions and comments be extended to allow better assessment and more time for a detailed submission from our community.

Yours sincerely

Ian Cole
President