

5th September 2008

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House,
Canberra, ACT, 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Senate Inquiry into water management in the Coorong and Lower Lakes

We would like to contribute to the above.

Whilst we are not environmental scientists, we are long term residents of Clayton Bay, and our property is on the River Bank of the Murray and Finnis Rivers confluence. We live with the water problems like all others along the rivers, but we are passionate about sustainable management of the entire river system and our unique Coorong environment.

We have no financial gains to make from this submission, but rather have a concern for the state of the environment and the subsequent long term social and economical impact from ongoing environmental mismanagement of the entire river system, including those areas that contribute to the flow, but are outside the Murray Darling Commission region, and how recent flood waters are being stored in private dams.

We therefore provide our comments for your consideration:

The volume of water which could be provided into the Murray-Darling system to replenish the Lower Lakes and Coorong can be staged. Water is currently not needed because lake inflows from good winter rains are potentially addressing acid sulphate soil incursion. Spring rains may continue to assist in this regard. Pumping into Adelaide dams should remain minimal or nil, and only used when necessary. The weir at Narrung should remain in place until environmental flows are returned to the area, and lake levels increased to a sustainable and appropriate level.

A culture for sourcing and delivering necessary environmental flows needs to be developed, allowing pollutants from the length of the entire river system to be washed out to sea, and maintain healthy and quality fresh water for critical human, stock and irrigation needs. With inadequate environmental flows this is not possible, and the Murray Mouth is being artificially kept open to assist 30% of the Coorong to stay alive.

A possible incentive and compensation scheme for current water holders who participate in a once-off voluntary contribution of water to this national emergency should not be considered. A water licence should be conditional upon available water. Water holders who purchased the water could have it compulsory acquired to recharge the river system at the current market rate. Licences could be purchased from a Federal body for a sustainable period, based on environmental flows. The 99 year Crown Land Lease is becoming a thing of the past, with Crown Land leases being renewed now on an annual basis. Why can't water have a similar situation, giving consideration to, but not reliant on irrigation and investment implications?

Likely transmission losses and the most efficient and effective strategies to manage the delivery of water, could include transferring of water during periods of low evaporation risk. Transmission losses would also be affected by dry wetlands and river beds etc.


Commonwealth powers to obtain and deliver water and possible legislative or regulative impediments, need to be urgently considered and developed, with potential constitutional changes made to remove the ownership and management powers of Murray Darling River Catchment system water from the States.

Anything which can improve irrigation infrastructure should be actioned as soon as possible, however this should be considered as a gift by the Commonwealth to irrigators (businesses who constructed the ineffectual systems in the first place) however a suitable food crops register for the Basin needs to be developed, and unsuitable crops prohibited, thereby spending taxpayer money in the most cost efficient way.

Long-term prospects for the management of Ramsar wetlands including the supply of adequate environmental flows; the risks to the basin posed by unregulated water interception activities and water theft; the ability of the Commonwealth to bind state and territory governments to meet their obligations under the National Water Initiative or to take-over complete water issue and management control from the States, and the adequacy of existing state and territory water and natural resource management legislation and enforcement arrangements should be the highest priorities with the long-term sustainable management of the Murray Darling Basin system .

Thankyou for this opportunity to have a say.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael W. Galea". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name.

Mike and Mary Galea