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The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

9 September 2008

SENATE INQUIRY INTO WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE COORONG AND LOWER LAKES

To whom it may concern:

The purpose of this paper is to provide an outline of community concerns *of the economy's "tertiary sector"* regarding the ongoing drought and diminishing water levels in the River Murray, Lower Lakes, Coorong and the Murray Mouth in South Australia.

This is not an appeal from the Australian Recreational Boating Industry or South Australian boaties, this is an appeal delivered on behalf of the rural/regional communities of South Australia.

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Existing and continuing drought conditions together with "over extraction" practises are having a wide-ranging, negative and most significant impact on lives and livelihoods across much of Australia.

In South Australia, businesses of the leisure, tourism and recreational sectors and those that support them (and, generally all of them are small, rural family concerns) located on/close to River Murray waters, particularly those waters "below" Lock 1 at Blanchetown through to the Murray Mouth and Coorong at Goolwa are suffering enormously.

We need to reaffirm that:

What we need, for the communities located close to the River Murray, Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth, particularly those located within the following Local Government Areas:

- City of Murray Bridge,
- DC Alexandrina,
- DC Coorong,
- DC Karoonda East Murray,
- DC Mid Murray and
- DC Victor Harbor

.... is replenishment of water stocks, to provide a reasonable level of fresh water, for the environment and for the community.

Water for the Environment = Water for the Community = Water for the Economy.

In addition to essential environmental and human needs, we need water for tourism, water for leisure and water for recreation.

And for the health of the environment and for the health of the communities, we need it now.

Further, we need immediate and ongoing access to vital "lost boating destinations", along the Murray and in the area of the Murray Mouth and the Coorong and we need the Goolwa Lock to be made available now. In the stretch of River Murray Waters below Blanchetown through to the Murray Mouth, it's worth restating that:

- forward houseboat and charter bookings have never been worse,
- the fleet is presently operating at around 50% of normal capacity. This delivers a negative impact to rural communities of around \$15Million annually,
- the use of the (privately) owned houseboat and cruising fleets is also down, by at least, 50% and this delivers a negative impact to the rural communities of around \$25Million annually,
- holidays and leisure visitation is way down on the Murray, in the Lakes and in the Coorong as people anticipate "no water at all within the River and Lakes and Coorong" and
- with these conditions, and the cancellation of lockages at Goolwa, with "nowhere to go" boats are relocating from inland waters of the Lakes and Lower Murray to marinas upstream and to coastal moorings,
- more than 500 large (non-trailerable, cruising craft) which offer overnight accommodation and/or galley services have gone from Lakes Albert and Alexandrina and
- the economic loss, to rural communities, incorporating aspects of boat servicing/fuelling/provisioning is estimated to be in the order of \$5Million annually,
- the economic loss delivered by the loss of revenues on moorings/berthing in rural communities is estimated to be in the order of \$2Million annually,
- "boating" and other "water based" day trippers and holiday makers numbers are down with a loss to the "rural economy" of at least \$200Million annually,
- despite the recent investment of millions of dollars on dredging, extending and rebuilding facilities most marinas, slips and ramps are unserviceable or becoming unserviceable,
- the operation of "cross River ferries" is becoming untenable and road traffic is being diverted to those communities where "cross River bridges" exist, to the detriment of the "have nots",
- so far as the tourism, recreation and leisure sectors (incorporating boat sales/boat repair, boat service/boat hire and charter operators) are concerned, things have never been worse.

Little consideration seems to have been given to those South Australians of over 70 communities (particularly to those 40 communities located below Lock 1) who have vital commercial connections with recreational, leisure and tourism/holiday activities:

- the heartbreak of the owners, managers, and staff of such businesses, who have spent decades, in some cases generations, in developing their assets and the reputation of their businesses,
- the increasing numbers of "holiday/recreation/leisure boating industry connected people" and those individuals from "related operations":
 - the caterers,
 - the fuellers,
 - the cleaners and the moppers,
 - those who build, sell, service and maintain boats,
 - the local provisioning organisations:
 - the pubs,
 - the dellies,
 - the newsagents and
 - the bakeries,
 - the sellers of fuel and
 - the purveyors of tackle and bait
 - all the others

... Are suffering enormous "social and economic difficulties" and many are joining the ranks of the unemployed and the disheartened.

The social costs: the damages to lives and relationships are inestimable.

We do hope that the Australian Senate is able to assist the generally:

- small,
- family owned,
- rural businesses

which are so drastically affected by the drought and by significant reductions of water supply due to "upstream extractions".

Water provided to the tertiary sector will, of course, deliver a bounty/deliver a measure of salvation to the environment.

I would be happy to discuss the contents of this paper at any time.

Yours faithfully,

Glen Jones
General Manager