



The Goulburn Valley Environment Group Inc.

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The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The Secretary

Inquiry into Water Management in the Coorong and Lower Lakes

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry.

The future management of Victoria's northern rivers will have an enormous impact on all environment features along and adjacent to those rivers, all Murray River icon sites including the Lower Lakes and the Coorong and the well-being of regional communities.

It is well understood that Victoria's northern rivers are over allocated -as an example in 2005/06 80% of stream flow in Goulburn River was diverted for consumptive purposes. It is also of interest to note that in the Goulburn system irrigators possess in excess of 1000GL of high reliability water while the environment has no high reliability water at its disposal.

The Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy (NRSWS) did not discuss in detail the over allocation of Victoria's northern rivers, and the direction of latest working draft appears to have been derailed by a political agenda and in many ways doesn't adhere to the outcomes of the community engagement process undertaken as part of the strategy development.

Key aspects associated with the NRSWS are as follows:

- The Victorian government is acting in defiance of departmental advice and community engagement outcomes by not agreeing to remove the 4% limit on trade out of irrigation districts to ensure entitlement holders have as much flexibility as possible to manage through dry and drought periods.
- The Victorian government policy on the 4% is contrary to the NWI and prevents water being used for its highest value.
- Current policy of the Victorian government will lead to further declines in health of the River Murray, and in particularly the Lower Lakes and Coorong.

To secure the future of environment of the northern Victoria, the icon sites including the Lower Lakes and the Coorong and regional communities, the Federal and Victorian governments must determine now where irrigation will be supported in the future and where irrigation must be withdrawn. Buy back of water entitlement must be complete before any further work is undertaken and be designed to deliver multiple environmental and social benefits. Selection of areas where irrigation is to cease will allow a suite of entitlement, associated water access rights

and land purchase options to be introduced that best suit sellers and buyers and facilitate implementation of targeted industry adjustment mechanisms and rural community and regional centre community service improvements. All government assistance processes should be utilised in the adjustment process. This should not be only about cessation of unsustainable irrigation in the designated areas. These areas should possess stock and domestic piped systems and be targeted to provide other primary products and services including grain, fodder, environmental corridors and carbon sequestration to complement the irrigation industry.

A substantial amount of the \$2 billion for the food bowl modernisation project and the \$3 billion available from the Federal Government should be directed to reducing the footprint of irrigated agriculture by at least 200,000 Ha and acquiring up to 500,000 ML of entitlement from northern Victoria. Doing so will improve river health, biodiversity and the sustainability of the system for those irrigators who remain.

I ask that the Goulburn Valley Environment Group be given the opportunity to present to the Inquiry in Melbourne on the 26 September 2008.

Yours sincerely



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