

11th Sept 2008

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

To Whom It May Concern:

Re Senate Inquiry into water management in the Coorong and Lower Lakes

I acknowledge the offer to make a submission to express concerns, issues and possible solutions to this matter.

The biggest problem I have at the moment is I don't have the time to put all concerns on paper. I am disappointed that the numerous meetings over the many years that I and my colleges have attended that the ideas and suggestions to combat issues before they arose have not been adhered to.

Direct words

Over allocation has occurred

Mismanagement has occurred

Drought over 6 years has occurred

Since 1981 the mouth closed – a sign to Gov., Departments, scientists

Listen to the people who live and breathe their areas – not only science/reports/government departments/ as they have proven to get it wrong in the past and who ultimately pays and is effected in the end is the community person

Irrigators – many uses of the word in so many reports – a irrigator who produces food – an irrigator who is a corporation/big business - an irrigator who doesn't need to be efficient as they are not price takers but price makers etc

I have been involved in community meetings to do with sport, environment, social, farming, church, water etc. all my working life. I am a community person and so passionate about the environment that I now hold a position as the Project Manager of the Mannum to Wellington Local Action Planning inc group a non for profit group working with community for a healthy river Murray and riverine environment through sustainable local uses of which I started out as a volunteer. I have been on the Lower Lakes and Murray drought reference group since its inception which is now called the Lower River Murray drought reference group Chaired by Dean Brown which deals with numerous issues mostly on the Lower Lakes and Coorong and am still on that committee. I have also been on the lower Murray support program since its inception which the funding ran out at the end of July of this year.

I also have been a "real" dairy farmer all my life and am connected to the land spiritually, sustainably, environmentally and economically.

May I say water will not go to the most efficient as we have proven in our area. Water will go to the most profitable and when you are a real farmer you are a price taken not a price maker. Also family "real" farms are not corporate/MIS/or big business and we can not compete on a level playing field.

Real Farms – are family farms who have been in the game for over 20-150 years. Farms that have been through the tough times and have pulled there weight. Most of us have had no assistance – unable to access EC or drought funding. We spend our money back in our towns we support on flow jobs in our towns and surrounding areas. We invest our \$ back in Australia not in an overseas companies.

Less than 2% are real farmers left in Australia

4% are indigenous

Less than 3,000 irrigators reside in SA back in 2005 – I am sure you can get the fact on just how many are left today. This is a very small amount of irrigators yet more \$ are spent

investigations, reports and like wise in stead of getting on with the job at hand saving the very few who produce food and have the knowledge and community spirit.

EC – exceptional circumstances funding for irrigators is too hard for irrigators to access and most of us do not fit in the boxes. I am sure you can get the facts on how many (and not a percentage as this figure distorts the facts)

I live in Australia-I have a farm-I am experiencing the same drought, over allocation, mismanagement, climate change as my neighbours up river who are able to access funding, water and assistance. Just because I have worked 3 jobs at once in my younger years, have a job at the moment that is over \$20,000 per year, have my children work on the farm for free since they where able, very frugal with our funds, very good operators and are willing to have a go at being sustainable and water use efficient I receive no assistance. We are proactive and we will not wait till our cows are standing thin, or have broken the bank to get a helping hand. I live in Australia and I can't see why the people in power are unable to see the simple actions we can be doing today to save our environment, our social impact we have on our communities and the on flow to Australian landscapes, communities and food supply and economic where the \$ are spent back in Australia. I do not use slave labour, I do not pay my workers a \$1 day wage, I do not use chemicals that have been band for years etc. Now with big business buying food form over seas we are not in control of all those issues.

Some suggestions in dot point on what we could to today missed in with issues

- All industry should be on restrictions at lease 10% for the first year
- Adelaide and river dependent downs must be on restriction 5-6 this will help educate the seriousness water issue we are in also the mind set that everybody can help
- Reduce pumping 90% of river water into the reservoirs and entice people to be self sufficient with better insentives
- Buy back water from willing sellers
- Buy back water at a descent rate to compensate a loss that the water holder has occurred due to no fault of there own approx \$4,000 and have only a window of opportunity for 90 days
- Pipe open channels in Vic., Qld. and NSW that delivers water to towns and properties – no extra licences should be issues. The evaporation savings, water seepage should not be calculated and given out in more licences
- Stop more ground water pumps being issues and pumping at 100%
- Stop more dams going in
- Stop life style properties from pumping river and ground into dams that are ascetic only – if you have a few stock for the next couple of years put the water in a trough – offer incentives to help with this
- Large Gum Trees are falling in our area due to the ground water dropping and the river level dropping– they can be saved
- Land is cracking issues where animals are injured this can be combated today
- Land slipping – willow trees/riparian zone now 30 meter in the river this is called slumping by engineers and we have studies done on this - we can deal with this issue today
- Ground water has dropped in the immediate area– this has not been calculated in the water audit and should be
- Ground water is becoming saline
- Farmers selling animals – breed loss – we can move to feed lotting / pads etc and that can be done today with support and incentives we have done the calculations on how to move quickly on this issue
- Farmers leaving – loss of skills etc – on ground assistance now – dealing with farmers who need assistance now in a practical way – we have ideas and now our area this could be rolled out now
- Acid sulfate soils an issue but can be combated now in small areas and using our community
- Lower the pool levels strategically - no where near the losses that have been written in reports

- Deal with issues at hand quickly – use local and committees that have been running for years and have solutions now to be implemented
- Look at the facts in SA royal Adelaide show 80% drop off with farm participation this year – the signs are there – we need practical help
- Stop wording like unregulated flows not being accounted for
- Get a one working body that holds power and not state against state or big business running our county. Lets listen to the people
- Stop more water going to Cities

There is so much more but I just am just running our of time and I do apologies.

I have been put on a water restriction with no compensation one day I have 100% of high security water the next I was on 0%. This year we started on 2% and have gone up to 6%. I ask you if I took 94% of your asset say your house or business could you survive with out any assistance. Because that is what you have done to the people around my area. We have lost two thirds of our highland growers and out of approx 120 dairy farms over the past 5 years (and remember the first drought put a lot of us on the edge let alone the following drought) we are down to approx 37

There are ways to save the remanding 37 and it can start today. We must use our committees and local people who have attended countless meetings but we need the political will to make decisions and put funds towards on ground works.

Words from a school teacher in Murray Bridge

Firstly thanks for the updates. I do follow the debate with interest and some frustration about the progress or lack thereof. The 'new' system of water allocations of course is a joke, esp. due to powers of veto that merely maintains self interest of states at others expense. From what I have been reading, and PD sessions I have been attending the outcomes of the enquiry seem almost pre-determined... ..the weir will go ahead, the lakes will be flooded, down stream users will probably get some compensation but communities will be damaged. While farmers may be assisted, they represent a base income for a community and the economic affects and damage would be hard to quantify but probably devastating for flow on organisations that rely directly or partially on farm based incomes.

Bottom line seems simple. We have a flawed system of water allocation, experts will be ignored or selectively listened to, the needs of the environment will be largely ignored, the river system that is likely to have less in it in the future and SA will pay the highest price for this as the downstream user.

I was at Flinders Uni last week and one of the speakers knew you very well. He spoke about the plight of the Murray in an excellent way, but painted a fairly bleak picture.

Good luck the Senate enquiry

I wish I was able to write more and explain the above better but time is some thing I don't have at the minute but am willing to meet with people if they wish to discuss more on how we can get action, water, community, social, economically viable environmental action today and in the coming months etc

Kathryn Rothe
Proud Dairy Farmer