14th April 2009

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

{Via email to: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au }

Dear Sir / Madam,

RE: MURRAY-DARLING BASIN

I thank you for the opportunity to submit a proposal to your committee investigating the problems of the Murray-Darling Basin. During my career as a surveyor, I have participated in mapping, mining and other major projects in every State of Australia, from Gore to Hobart. I retired from practice in 1987 and have since spent many hours investigating proposals for Watering Australia.

It soon became obvious that Northern Australia has a surfeit of water with no means of moving it south to where the population is growing. During my research at the Mitchell and Stanton Libraries, I found reports by the RT. Hon. Sir Earle Page (1945), Rankine & Hill Pty Ltd (1982), and J.G. Beale (1985).

Those presenting papers to this Senate Inquiry are obviously experts in their fields, who have spent many frustrating years on this project. Unfortunately one can only compare these presentations as testimony to the death of the Great Murray-Darling River. Without Climate Change and substantial rain, they will not have long to wait.

The National Water Initiative referred to in these presentations will only manage the available water without providing the necessary additional water.

The Clarence Basin covers 22,700 square kilometres, with an average annual rainfall of 1,920mm on the central southern margin to 820mm on the high northwest plateau areas. The Clarence is the largest NSW coastal stream.

The weather patterns of the Clarence and Murray-Darling Basins are complementary. The Clarence Basin benefits from the Monsoon rains from January to March as well as the cyclones from the Coral Sea. The Murray-Darling usually expects winter and spring rains from August to December.

In 1980 the Rankine & Hill report recommended that the Clarence Valley Inter-Departmental Committee on Water Resources authorise a feasibility study of the diversion of water from the Clarence Valley Basin to the Murray-Darling Basin.

The 1980 Report stressed strongly that it is a practical impossibility to divert the total flow of any stream in the Clarence Basin to the Inland. However, it determined:

Firstly, only that part of the flow which occurs at the diversion point is available for diversion and this will often be a minor part of the total catchment runoff.

Secondly, there will be a need to maintain some flow in the coastal stream immediately downstream of the diversion point to satisfy the requirements of existing and future users and to minimise adverse environmental impacts.

Thirdly: floods which occur on coastal streams can be so large that it is impossible to store and divert all of the flow, with the result that a proportion will always pass downstream to the ocean.

These three considerations will ensure that the impact will be minimal on the coastal rivers, flora and fauna and the prawn and fishing industry. Indeed, on the rare occasion there has been no flood, a flushing of the river would benefit the prawn and fishing industry.

It was anticipated that a minimum of 750,000 ML of water can be diverted to the Murray Darling Basin.

On Australia Day 1983, Mr Malcolm Fraser announced investigations for an environmental storage on the Upper Murray. Now both State and Federal Governments acknowledge the feasibility study of the Clarence Valley Basin should be carried out.

Mr Jack G. Beale was a consulting chartered engineer and chairman of the Water Research Foundation of Australia. He was NSW Minister for Conservation and also Minister for the Environment. He described the Clarence River Basin as "a sleeping giant of water, power and national wealth". He proposed a full investigation of the Clarence Hydro-electric scheme which could divert 2 million megalitres annually to the Murray-Darling Basin.

Copies of the reports by Sir Earle Page, Rankine & Hill and Jack Beale have been forwarded to the Federal Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts and the State Department of Water and Energy.

The following is some of the information contained in their replies. The Government Departments are depending on climate change, using water wisely, securing water supplies and supporting healthy rivers. Hydro-electric generators that involve the construction of new dams are generally not supported. They are concerned that the environmental impact of diverting water from Australia's rivers may also be high and could range from changes to river ecosystems to significant water erosion as a result of additional water.

How can the Federal government ignore the information available which supports the Feasibility Study of the Murray-Darling Basin and Clarence Valley Basin?

I am confident that $20 Million (less than the cost of Toorale Station at Bourke) spent on investigation would enable this project to be thoroughly examined and its potential realised.

If through the inaction of the Senate Inquiry the Murray-Darling is allowed to die, the ramifications for the future of Australia will be horrendous. With people already leaving Bourke and Deniliquin, the lack of work and hope in the Basin will force the people back to the cities to compete with the proposed 200,000 immigrants.

When the history of Australia is written, will the demise of the Murray-Darling River be listed as fact or fiction?

Yours faithfully,

Ron Wilde
Surveyor (Retired)