Murrumbidgee
CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Contact: John Francis
Phone: (02) 6932 3231
Fax: (02) 6932 3269
Email: john.francis@cma.nsw.gov.au

Our Ref:
You Ref: CCC29

Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change)
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Thursday, 18 February 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Sustainable Water Management Inquiry

Thank you for your recent invitation to make a submission to the inquiry by the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on NRM (Climate Change). Please find here some brief suggestions which I believe to be of particular significance as we move into a period of great uncertainty regarding water availability.

Regarding the availability of water resources under different scenarios:

- The definition and review of bulk access regimes for water sources needs to be undertaken in a consistently transparent and consultative way especially in light of the Murray Basin Plan and the potential for more than one process, and extractive limit, to be applied to one water source.
- Extractive limits need to be informed by best available information and comprehensive consultation so as to achieve the necessary balance of preserving aquatic health and providing for efficient and productive extractive water uses.
- There needs to be clear differentiation of roles between the NSW and Australian Governments, particularly in implementing sustainable diversion limit sources across the Murray Darling Basin.

Regarding the management of water resources such as environmental flows:

- Environmental flow rules need to be developed with very clear targets and desired outcomes upfront, stated in simple terms, with measurable, timely parameters. Causal influences on these targets must be identified and implemented in a transparent way.
- Triggers for environmental flow rules such as Cease to Pump provisions and release scenarios need to be clearly articulated to extractive users in order to maximise the opportunities for users to adapt and make necessary changes to infrastructure or cropping programs.
- The effectiveness of environmental flow rules needs to be continuously reviewed and evaluated to ensure the rules are achieving what they are intended to achieve whilst minimising the impacts on competing demands for water.

Murrumbidgee
CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

- The predictability of agreed flow rules needs to be assessed against the best available information of flow reliability. The predictive capability of current models may not lend well to future flow patterns and the capability of many models currently used must be reviewed.
- Comprehensive monitoring of environmental flows should be undertaken so as to inform evaluative judgements of the success of flow rules. These results need to be more widely published than they are now, and in more simple terms, so as to communicate the very significant social and economic benefits of healthy water ways in NSW.

Regarding matters of best practice in water conservation and management:

- An open and transparent market place has greatly facilitated recovery of water for the environment and the mitigation of impacts on water consumers. The market must remain unrestricted so as to ensure these benefits are continued and their potential fully realised. Market barriers, limits to trade, license conditions which to not provide for all dealings, and other market constraints must be identified and minimised.
- Improved accounting and metering of water use in NSW is paramount. So too is the ability to meter and account for water across water sources and between political jurisdictions such as across the whole Murray Darling Basin.
- Clear differentiation of roles and accountabilities between the NSW and Australian Governments is critical, especially with regard to water sharing between jurisdictions, the operation of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) in setting aquatic targets for assets, flow rules, or managing operational constraints within NSW.
- Partnerships between regionalised NRM organisations (CMA's) and the CEWH in collaborating to set targets for aquatic health outcomes in a synergistic way have very real potential.
- Currently a range of models exist for various rivers across the Murray Darling Basin. A universal modelling capability will greatly enhance the way water is managed across the basin, particularly water trading, accounting of water usage and storage, and the definition and operation of environmental flow rules across the basin.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry and I would encourage you to engage with all the CMA's in brining the findings together. I look forward to hearing from you in the short term and to contributing further to the process.

Yours sincerely,

John Francis
Acting General Manager
Murrumbidgee CMA