

Cargelligo Wetlands & Lakes Foundation
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Ms Vicki Buchbach
The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change)
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

February 26, 2010

Dear Ms Buchbach,

**Re: Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change)
Water Management Inquiry**

On behalf of the Cargelligo Wetlands & Lakes Foundation we wish to include our voice in the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change) current inquiry into Water Management, particularly with regard to the management of water resources for all water users, including the environment.

Background

The Cargelligo Wetlands & Lakes Foundation (CWLF) was established by a public meeting in December 2007. The board is made up of ten representative committee members, including farmers, an indigenous member, a shire councillor, local business people, and representatives of other community stakeholders.

The CWLF aims to engage all relevant stakeholders, including government departments and advisory panels to ensure that the Lake Cargelligo wetlands and lakes system, its ecosystems, communities, and economy are directly represented in policy, planning, and management of water.

The Lake Cargelligo System

The Lake Cargelligo system, through the work of the CWLF and other community members, is increasingly being recognised as an environmental asset that has been neglected in water policy and planning.

The value of the Lake Cargelligo system to the environment, community, and economy in the Lower Lachlan cannot be understated. Most significantly Lake Cargelligo is an important drought refuge to birds, wildlife, and aquatic species.

By way of background, Lake Cargelligo is a naturally occurring wetland system, first described by Oxley in 1817, and again in 1836 by the Surveyor-General Major Mitchell, as a magnificent lake, being connected to the Lachlan River by way of Cudjallagong Creek (now known as Lake Creek).

In 1901 an artificial bank and channels were installed to increase the depth of water in Lake Cargelligo, although restricting the surface area, to add to the management value of Lake Cargelligo for community and agriculture.

The Lake Cargelligo system has always been a significant and naturally occurring lake and wetlands system, extending well beyond its current boundaries. This was demonstrated in 2007 by storm waters that accumulated outside the man-made levee.

The main area of Lake Cargelligo now has a surface area of 1,500ha, a maximum depth of 4m, and maximum capacity of 36,000ML, a significant portion of which can be returned to the Lachlan River system for use in the Lower Lachlan.

Water Management

The CWLF maintain that recent management of water in the Lachlan River has led to the current environmental, social, and economic emergency in Lake Cargelligo and the lower Lachlan.

In recent years government planning and policy has referred, incorrectly, to Lake Cargelligo as a man-made storage, and has been managed as such. For example, storm waters in 2007 were transferred to Lake Cargelligo and subsequently diverted downstream, rather than managed for the benefit of the environment and community.

The consequences of management of the Cargelligo system as an off-river storage have been devastating to the Lake Cargelligo environment, community, and economy, particularly during the recent periods of low rainfall.

The inappropriate management of the Lake Cargelligo system has resulted in the drying out of the Lake bed, with only Lake Curlew maintaining a small volume of water for the local town supply and recreation. The outcome being that the last significant drought refuge below Wyangala is no longer available to flora, fauna, and the community.

It is recognised that wetlands systems, comprised of diverse native aquatic vegetation, will improve water quality and provide habitat and breeding grounds for other flora and fauna, including the locally occurring populations of threatened and endangered species such as Bush Stone Curlew, Freckled Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Sea Eagle, Glossy Ibis, Pink Eared Ducks, Black Swans, and Brolgas.

The CWLF proposes that managing flow regimes from the Lachlan River such that water enters the Cargelligo system, is filtered by reed beds, cumbungee, and diverse aquatic vegetation, and re-enters the river with much improved water quality for the benefit of the lower Lachlan.

The CWLF is working in consultation with the Lachlan Catchment Management Authority and community stakeholders to develop a management plan for the Cargelligo wetlands and lakes.

The CWLF is also working to raise the profile of Lake Cargelligo as a significant environmental asset, with greater priority than its current status.

Climate change theory currently suggests that rainfall will be lower. The Cargelligo Wetlands & Lakes Foundation believe that the following recommendations will maximise the benefit of any water in the Lachlan River system and ensure that water quality and management will deliver the most positive outcomes for the environment, community, and economy.

Recommendations

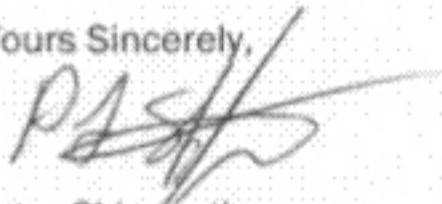
1. The Cargelligo wetlands and lakes system be acknowledged as a wetland of national importance
2. Environmental water is allocated to the Cargelligo system for the purposes of maintaining the wetlands and habitat for flora and fauna
3. Funds are invested in the rehabilitation of the wetlands to improve the function of the wetland as a naturally occurring breeding habitat, drought refuge, and water quality management tool
4. Management of environmental flows includes maintaining a Lachlan River flow that is recycled through the Cargelligo system to maximise the investment in environmental water by reducing evaporation and improving water quality
5. The Cargelligo system is included in water sharing.

The overall outcome of these recommendations will ensure that Lake Cargelligo is an appropriately managed water and environment asset.

Increased flows and improved quality will reduce the reliance of the local community on emergency funding for water supplies, deliver economic benefits through tourism, industry, and agriculture, and increase the capacity of water managers to deliver flows to the Lower Lachlan. Importantly, all these benefits would be derived from an energy efficient, carbon neutral system, operated by gravity and environmental flows.

Should you need any further information or have any queries please contact me on 04 2898 1749.

Yours Sincerely,



Peter Skipworth
Chairperson