



NSW Legislative Council
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Inquiry into the Augmentation of Water Supply for Rural and Regional New South
Wales

This is a supplementary submission to the Broken Hill Chamber of Commerce's original Submission made to the above mentioned Inquiry. This Submission is in response to a question taken on notice during evidence given by Mr Dennis Roach, to the Inquiry at the Public Hearing in Broken Hill on 26 October 2016. The question on notice relates to the Northern Basin Review and its relevance to issues raised by the Chamber of Commerce Submission on the economic impact of water in Broken Hill and Menindee.

In summary the Northern Basin Review and the Basin Plan has the following objectives:

- To set limits on the amount of water that can be taken for agriculture town water supplies, industry and other human or 'consumptive' uses to ensure there is enough water to achieve healthy river and ground water systems.
- Improved information on achieving environmental outcomes and social and economic costs and benefits for different diversion limits.
- Recommendations about possible improvements to Basin Plan settings in the northern Basin.
- Advice for the Commonwealth Department of the Environment on how best to recover the remaining target for environmental water.

The Broken Hill Chamber of Commerce strongly supports the on-going independent Review and Planning process to provide the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) with high quality, objective and realistic advice for the benefit of the health and viability of the inland waterways systems. The BH Chamber of Commerce is vitally aware that the social and economic welfare of the Far West Region of NSW is highly dependent on the availability of an adequate and healthy water supply.

The Northern Basin Review and Basin Plan are mainly concerned with the conditions on the river systems in north western NSW and particularly in south western Queensland. These areas are largely to source point for the Darling River, which is the source of most vital interest to Broken Hill, Menindee and as well, Wilcannia. Ultimately the amount of water coming down the Darling River is also of importance to the water flows of the Murray River.

The BH Chamber of Commerce notes that the Northern Basin Intergovernmental Working group includes Representatives from the NSW Government. It is our view that further NSW representatives from Local Government and Business Representative Groups (for example,

the NSW Business Chamber) could also have an advisory role, working through the NSW Government's representative structure.

The Northern Basin Review and Basin Plan recognises a number of working groups, eg. The Lower Balonne Working Group. The BH Chamber of Commerce considers that there is room for similar consultative groups involving people who represent water user groups, environmental groups, traditional owners and farmers and graziers whose livelihood is dependent on the good health of the lower Darling. A more coordinated approach to bring the views of these diverse groups would be welcome. This coordinated approach could feed up to Northern Basin Intergovernmental Working group and the MDBA.

The BH Chamber of Commerce notes that there are recommendations for Social and Economic Assessments. In particular, Assessment of Impacts on Regions and Assessments of Impacts on Communities. Assessment tools such as these would both be valuable and welcome for the communities in the Far West of NSW. There is however a substantial cost in undertaking such Assessments, and such costs are way beyond the capacity of communities to fund and there would need the financial assistance of Government.

This would be Government money well spent, as the recommendations of such Assessments would result in enhanced and better quality economic activity in the Far West, with the added social benefits of increased training and job opportunities, lower unemployment and the added benefit of less social disfunction and problems with youth caused by under employment.

The following is a brief summary of Assessments in relation to the social and economic impacts on the region, which the BH Chamber of Commerce would see as a starting point:

- The Impact of current water policies on the health of the Menindee Lakes system.
- The effects of water policy on tourism in the Far West region. The Menindee Lakes play a major role in the recreational and tourism activities of the Far West region. There would be substantial social and quality of life cost if the decommissioning of the pipeline includes the downgrade of the Menindee lakes system.
- The social, environmental and economic impact on the township of Menindee if the pipeline between Menindee and Broken Hill is decommissioned.
- The effects of proposed new mining projects. There are a significant number of new mining projects planned in the Far West, covering a range of minerals, such as gold, silver, lead, zinc, cobalt and iron ore. These projects will also require differing degrees water use and will also have the effect of encouraging population growth in the Region.
- In addition to new mining projects, a number of new and innovative tourism and environmental projects are currently being developed. For example the Whiteleeds wetlands project approximately 8 kms south of Broken Hill. These projects are going to need some assurance concerning adequacy and reliability of water resources.
- The proposed new pipeline from the Murray River to Broken Hill. Although the NSW Government has given indications of how construction will be paid for they have not

indicated a pricing structure for the pipeline's ongoing operation and maintenance. These costs would have a significant effect on the financial viability of existing businesses in the Far West region.

I hope that the information contained in this supplementary Submission is of assistance to the Committee in its work. I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this information.

Dennis Roach

Public Officer/ Volunteer Project Officer

9 December 2016