

Inquiry into Floodplain Harvesting

Response to question taken on notice at hearing (p56 of transcript)

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Thank you. We have obviously had a lot of discussion and there has been contention about what happens if you completely remove floodplain harvesting from the northern Basin and what that will mean for total inflows into the Murray River. It has been contested as to what the numbers are. It has been suggested by you, by the Government, that those inflows, if they were removed, would increase by less than 1 per cent on average. I know that we have discussed this a little today, but my question is if you could point to the substantive evidence that shows that. If you want to take that on notice then you are very welcome to.

Mr BROWN: I think I might take it on notice. Or Mr Connor?

Mr CONNOR: I can elucidate the Committee with some detail. Just a simple example because I think it is easy to understand. We know that the northern Basin inflow, if you look at published information under baseline diversion limits conditions, which are all the baseline diversion limit models supplied by the basin States and that is the starting premise for the basin plan—if you look at that report, it is freely available. I can certainly provide the link. You can see that the northern Basin contributes to the southern Basin about 1,700 GLs a year, on average. We know that the flows at Wentworth are 12,400 a year on average. We know that of that 12,400, 10,700 from that water balance that was done using those baseline diversion limits conditions actually comes from the southern Basin. That is where that 14 per cent statistic comes from.

As has already been mentioned, I think by the New South Wales Irrigators' Council, if you have a look at our IPART determination, we have put some estimates of what we expect floodplain harvesting to be. That you can back calculate, it is about 250 GLs of floodplain harvesting licences long-term average. If hypothetically you took all of that water, put it in a bucket and ran it down to Menindee Lakes and tipped it in Menindee Lakes—which we know is not the case. This water supports a range of really important ecosystem functions across the northern Basin, like recharging groundwater and wetlands. It is filling the soil moisture profiles for cropping farmers, and it is supporting the environment as it moves down the system. But hypothetically, pick it up and put it in a bucket and tip it in Menindee Lakes. We know that is about a 14 per cent increase in inflows into the Menindee Lakes. Using those same statistics you arrive at about a 2 per cent increase in flows at Wentworth.

Just really simple maths with some really radical out there assumptions—like picking the water up off the floodplain, taking it down in a bucket and putting it in Menindee Lakes—you can arrive at a figure of 2 per cent. We definitely have analysis to back it up. But I think it is so starkly obvious from just published information that is available to anybody to calculate that statistic. But I thought it was worthwhile sharing that with you.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: If you did want to put any further information on notice you would be very welcome to do so.

Response

The Department does not wish to provide any additional information to support the answer provided above by the witness at the hearing.