

**INQUIRY INTO A SUSTAINABLE WATER SUPPLY FOR
SYDNEY**

Organisation:

Name: Mr Alan Lawrence

Telephone:

Date Received: 16/02/2006

Subject:

Summary

My submission is in regard to the local and environmental impacts of proposed Shoalhaven River Transfers proposed by the government to meet Sydney's water needs. Please add this aspect of water transfers from the Shoalhaven River to the terms of reference as it is also a crucial point in this whole matter.

In summary water transfers from the Shoalhaven River need to be reduced and not increased in order to ensure the health of the river. Any contemplation to increase transfers will be disastrous for the river!!

Shoalhaven Lodge

16 February 2006

Dear Sir/Madam

**Submission - General Purpose Standing Committee No.5:
Inquiry into a Sustainable Water Supply for Sydney**

My submission is in regard to the local and environmental impacts of proposed Shoalhaven River Transfers proposed by the government to meet Sydney's water needs. Please add this aspect of water transfers from the Shoalhaven River to the terms of reference as it is also a crucial point in this whole matter.

I am strongly against additional water transfers from the Shoalhaven River.

• **Poor Condition of the River Today**

Before considering potential additional transfers from the Shoalhaven River, it is important to understand the size and scope of the problem today. The river is presently in severe distress and is rapidly deteriorating to its condition just before the heavy rains last July. Before July, one only had to look at the river to see the growing problem: high salinity moving upstream causing destruction of fish habitat and stock losses in the oyster, prawning and fishing industries; and **kilometers (30 kilometers – all the way inland from the ocean!) of massive jelly fish infestation** making the river look unsightly and very dangerous for swimming, water skiing, wind surfing and other water based forms of recreation. A number of local people have commented that the river can look great but "...you better not go in it..."! Shoalhaven tourism is

being negatively affected with all accommodation businesses on the river suffering because guests are complaining about jelly fish infestation and stings.

- **Cause of the Problem Today**

The main problem today is caused by the fact that the flow of water from the Tallowa Dam to the river (i.e. the environmental flow) is completely inadequate to ensure the health of the river. In simple terms – the amount of fresh water flowing down the river is just too low. The present environmental flow was established some years ago and the flow rate was an estimate based on insufficient facts. The only thing that has stopped the river from deteriorating further, and dying, is the fact that periodically the Tallowa Dam has reached 100% and the excess water has then flowed over the dam wall (designed that way) which then flushes down the river. These ‘flushes’ have been essential to ‘clear the river’ – removing millions of jelly fish, etc. and helping to partly re-establish a more natural ecosystem.

- **What is making the problem Bigger Today?**

Due to the draught over the last few years, an increasing amount of water has been transferred from the Tallowa Dam to Sydney. This has massively reduced the amount of water in the dam. So much water has been transferred from the dam that it has rarely been full and thus there have been fewer flushes (last July was the first for several years). As stated above the lack of flushes is devastating for the health of the river – without flushes the river will certainly die, because the environmental flow is inadequate.

- **What Problem will Additional Transfers Bring?**

It is clear from the above explanation that the health of the Shoalhaven River depends primarily on establishing the correct environmental flow. The environmental flow today is demonstrably inadequate. What we need is a water sharing plan which commits to an environmental flow that will maintain river health as a priority over any interbasin transfers. Although the river has had some benefit from flushes in the past, the river is under extreme stress because although flushes are beneficial, they do not represent a normal eco-system and they should not be relied upon in any well considered management plan. **It therefore follows that water transfers from the Shoalhaven River need to be reduced and not increased in order to ensure the health of the river. Any contemplation to increase transfers will be disastrous for the river!!**

- **Is the Shoalhaven River That Important?**

The Shoalhaven River is one of Australia's most beautiful rivers and a valuable resource for the local community and indeed everyone in Australia. It is the life-blood of the Shoalhaven community. We cannot allow this river to be sacrificed because of the growing demands for water by Sydney residents.

- **What is the Solution?**

The terms of reference identifies a number of key areas to be investigated.

Recycling and storm water harvesting, together with better education and higher water charges, will help achieve a sustainable and secure future for Sydney's water supply. If Sydney were to start recycling in a serious way (as many major cities world-

wide do) there would be no need to transfer any water to Sydney, and the health of the Shoalhaven River would be assured. The previous Minister responsible for Sydney Water, Frank Sartor, often stated "Sydney people don't want to drink sewage". Well no-one is asking them to! Any waste water can be treated to drinking quality standards as is done the world over – what can possibly make Sydney people so different?

Sydney needs to become self-sustaining with its water needs so that there will be no need whatsoever to take any water from the Shoalhaven.

Yours sincerely

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