

**Submission
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INQUIRY INTO ADEQUACY OF WATER STORAGES IN NSW

Organisation: NSW Farmers Association – Griffith Branch

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NSW FARMERS ASSOCIATION

Griffith Branch

**Submission to the NSW Standing
Committee on State Development**

***Inquiry into the adequacy of water
storages in NSW***

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Introduction

NSWfarmers Branch in Griffith represents more than 138 members across the Griffith area. Our members include horticulture, viticulture, dry land and large area irrigation farmers.

This document represents the views of NSW Farmer's members and we are highly supportive of the construction of dams to service the increasing need for productive water and to provide adequate water supplies for towns and cities in regional and remote NSW.

Background

This is a formal submission on the *inadequacies* of water storages from the Griffith District Branch of the NSW Farmers Association.

The Murray Darling Basin Basin producers one third of Australia's food supply and supports over a third of Australia's total gross value of production.

The Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) where Griffith is located is a purpose built irrigation area and has its centenary this year. It is one of the most diverse and productive regions in Australia contributing over [A\\$5](#) billion annually to the Australian economy. Commodities include rice, citrus, cotton, poultry, eggs, pigs, horticulture, and viticulture.

We have fertile soils, plenty of sunshine all the natural ingredients for one of the world's premier food producing areas. We are highly critical of the MDBA plan and the removal of productive water from the purpose built irrigation area. In fact we would like more water to help provide food and fibre for the demands of the world's growing populations. We need more available water storages rather than the buying back of water, stable visionary government policy and less bureaucracy so that we can be optimally productive.

Beginning of System

The Snowy Mountain Scheme which was completed in 1974 after 25 years consists of sixteen major dams, seven power stations, a pumping station and 225km of tunnels. This scheme provides hydroelectricity and irrigation water to southeast NSW. The design and construction was financed from the Commonwealth Government. The Snowy Hydro has the rights over collection, storage, diversion and release of the Schemes water. It has flexibility to store and release water for electricity production and for use of irrigation water for communities and the environment. However what is evolving is far from an integrated approach to the management of electricity production and water supplies for down- stream communities and irrigators. At the present time the storages have been managed by N.S.W. and the Victorian water agencies, the MDBA/ MDBC making water management “a dog’s breakfast”. We think it is time for serious look at a better model to satisfactorily address this situation.

Redefining our existing dams

The Burrinjuck and Blowering dams were built by past governments to provide water which was to generate hydro- electricity and to be used to secure food and fibre production for the nation. South western NSW was considered climatically stable, geographically isolated and a safe area for reliable food production for the growing nation. The proposed basin plan is redefining those dams from productive use to prioritize environmental water with little consideration for irrigators and associated communities. Timing of releases will be based on environmental needs and financial gain when generating hydroelectricity. The availability of irrigation water at critical times such as in the spring is imperative for optimizing food production.

What we need is an integrated approach in the management of the Snowy Mountain Scheme.

Is there too much water bureaucracy?

Who's who in water? We are so over burdened with water bureaucracy that it beggars belief. For example after a quick investigation some useful acronyms of organizations to know in water include-:

ACCC, AWD, BCC, DSE, DWLBC, DECCW, DSEWPC, EWA, IAL, IPART, MDBA, MDBC, MIA, MIL, NOW, State Water, NRAC, NRC, NSW GAC, NWC, SHL, SWC, and WFTF

Basically we believe that we should review and streamline water bureaucracy. We have layers of rules and regulations that work at cross purposes to each other and damage businesses and communities. It is important to note that the health of our rivers cannot be enhanced by adding levels of bureaucracy.

We need a reform vision that builds on the strengths of our irrigation communities rather than strangling them. A well thought out policy and regulatory system with well-defined goals and responsibilities and clear accountability. Complicated costly water management is hurting people!

A vision for the future

Two thirds of the world's food is grown from irrigated agriculture so who's against irrigation? Many foods that Australians eat everyday are produced by irrigation. Sustainable irrigation in regional communities also supports other regional industries vital to the Australian economy.

In Australia, it makes good sense to conserve water when times are plentiful to build in productive capacity. During March this year we experienced unprecedented flooding and if we had had more water storages we could have mitigated the damage to property and captured a renewable resource.



Photo showing flooding near Yenda (March 2012) Let's save water for a droughty day/year/decade!

What's going on in the rest of the world?

In short, a lot. While we deliberate on whether we should even mention the word dams, other countries are planning and building for the future.

Australia in the last 30 years has not built any dams with the exception of Wivenhoe in Queensland. This was a response to flooding in 1974 and used for power generation. The governments in Australia have suffered from political “gutlessness” and focused on popular issues in order to remain in power. We have no vision for food & fibre production and power generation for the coming decades.

Our population is set to increase and governments are encouraging population growth with no forward planning on how we meet food and power needs.

The World Bank has financed over 500 dams across 92 countries. In Brazil alone they construct 3 to 4 dams per year. So what's wrong with us?

Where do we put these water storages?

The decision to build more dams would have to be in consultation with engineers, hydrologists and communities but there are plenty of options-:

- Dams on some of the Queensland rivers that run into the Darling
- Near Holbrook on the Billabong Creek
- Shoalhaven River
- East of Wagga Wagga
- East Coast of Australia- plenty of area to recapture this resource
- Completing the Chowilla Dam
- Dams below the Hume Dam
- Increasing other dams storage capacity
- East of Narrandera
- Dams near Tarcutta, Jugiong, Kyamba Creeks

There is a perception that dams are bad for the environment. It is actually the opposite. If we had not had the Snowy River Scheme the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers would have ceased to flow during the decade of drought we have just experienced. These dams improved the flow and reliability of water heading west. They provided water for towns and communities and for permanent plantings of horticulture and viticulture and stock and domestic water for farmers.

End of system storage, the Lower Lakes

It would appear to be extremely misguided point of view to try and convert an estuarine system at the Lower Lakes in SA into a fresh water one. This is a coastal system and should be treated as one. It is ridiculous to try and fill these vast lakes with fresh water and allow this valuable resource to evaporate. It is the same example for Sydney Harbour. Perhaps we should build barrages there and stop

the sea water coming in. We could then rely on Parramatta River to fill with the harbour fresh water and keep its mouth open!

Summary

Yes, we do need extra water storages to secure food, fibre and hydro-electricity production to meet our future needs. There are many sites we can explore for the possibility of increasing our water storage capacity. Water storages actually enhance environments, help mitigate flooding events, increase our productive capacity as well as supporting our communities and contributing to the nation's wealth. Governments need a vision and the courage to plan for our future needs.