

**Submission
No 53**

INQUIRY INTO WATER AUGMENTATION

Organisation: Central West Environment Council

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Hon Robert Brown MLC
Chairman
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
NSW Parliament Legislative Council

12 August 2016

SUBMISSION

Inquiry into the augmentation of water supply for rural and regional New South Wales

Central West Environment Council (CWEC) is an umbrella organization representing conservation groups and individuals in central west NSW working to protect the local environment for future generations.

CWEC wishes to thank the NSW Legislative Council for running an Inquiry into management of water in rural and regional NSW. We welcome the opportunity to provide information on this important issue.

Terms of Reference 1a)

CWEC fully supports the need to develop a 'water equation' or water balance considering demand and supply out to the middle of this century for rural and regional NSW.

Water supply in rural and regional NSW is based on rainfall events and water stored in aquifers. This is a finite resource that must be carefully exploited to maintain water quality, water dependent ecosystems, aquatic fauna and intergenerational equity.

The predicted variability of extreme weather events caused by climate change, particularly extended droughts such as the Millenium Drought, must

be taken into account when considering water supply and demand up to 2050. This is only 34 years away.

The scale of development and increased water demand over the past 30 years since the mid 1980's has been significant and cannot be expected to continue at the same rate without major change to water use patterns.

A detailed analysis of water supply constraints during long periods of drought must be a key factor of the water balance investigation.

Terms of Reference 1b)

CWEC does not support the development of new large dams in NSW to augment water supply. Dams have significant impacts on river ecology and health that cannot be mitigated.

Large instream water storages cause the loss of natural flow sequences and volumes of flow, change in seasonality of flows, impacts on water quality both in storage and instream and loss of connectivity to floodplains and groundwater systems. The reduction of wetlands, water dependent vegetation communities and wildlife populations has been a major negative outcome from the impoundment of large volumes of river water across the state.

CWEC does not support the proposal to construct a new large dam on the Belubula River at Needles Gap or at Cranky Rock. The geology of the area is pitted with limestone karst systems, including the iconic Cliefden Caves formation. The purpose of this dam is unclear while a significant amount of NSW tax-payer money is being invested in a feasibility study.

A new dam on the Belubula River will change existing water shares in the Lachlan River system affecting the current water sharing rules for both the Belubula River and the Lachlan River.

This water impoundment will impact on natural flows to downstream stock and domestic users, basic rights users and the significant floodplain wetlands, including the Booligal wetlands and Great Cumbung Swamp.

The dam site will inundate prime agricultural land, important riverine ecosystems and threaten the unique karst systems and their dependent wildlife.

CWEC considers that future schemes for augmentation of water supply must be based on water use efficiency savings and decreased demand. This requires significant changes to agricultural demand away from wasteful flood irrigation, improved building design with water capture and low demand parks and gardens.

Terms of Reference 1c)

CWEC fully supports recommendations 3, 16 and 19 of the June 2013 report by the Standing Committee on State Development on the adequacy of water storages in New South Wales

These recommendations have been supported in the NSW Government's response to the report. It is critical that a report be provided to this Inquiry on the progress made in rural and regional NSW to:

- improve demand management practices and urban water conservation measures
- continue an integrated water management and conservation policy, that fosters responsible use of water in urban, industrial and agricultural settings
- invest in water efficiency research and development, to inform an integrated, best practice approach to water management, and to further advances in this area.

Terms of Reference 1f)

CWEC considers that the current NSW Government has failed to manage water in a manner that provides balanced social, economic and environmental outcomes.

We are particularly concerned that continuous water agency restructures and budget cuts has caused a critical loss of corporate knowledge and expertise from the important functions of water management in NSW.

Some examples of poor water management decisions:

- Recent amendments to the Water Management Act have given precedence of supply to general security licence holders,
- The gazetted water sharing plans for unregulated and groundwater systems have not provided adequate environmental protections,
- The Water Shepherding Framework does not protect environmental flows from extraction for commercial use,
- The Barwon Darling Water Sharing Plan has increased water availability for extraction,
- All floodplain harvesting structures have been approved regardless of their environmental impact and removal of flood water benefits from downstream users including floodplain graziers,
- The 10 year review of regulated river water sharing plans has not been adequately conducted
- The development of Water Resource Plans under the Murray Darling Basin Plan has had significant delays

CWEC considers that the poor management of water in the northern inland river systems, combined with increased extractive rights along the Barwon-Darling has caused the crisis of water supply for Broken Hill.

We do not support the proposed pipeline from the Murray River because this will cause a shift away from understanding and correcting poor management of flows in the Darling River system.

The NSW Government has been particularly non-cooperative in the implementation of the Basin Plan. This will have long-term social, economic and environmental impacts.

Terms of Reference 1g)

CWEC considers that the system of Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAGs) managed by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) provides an efficient platform for the management of State and Federal Government environmental water portfolios, along with planned environmental water in NSW.

EWAGs consist of community representatives providing local knowledge and perspective, representatives from the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and Murray Darling Basin Authority and representatives from NSW Govt agencies Water NSW, DPI Water and Fisheries and OEH.

These groups decide on the annual environmental watering plan for each NSW regulated river system in the Basin. The plan generally consists of the planned use or carryover of all available environmental water portfolios as a single volume. This provides integration of decision-making and water use to provide the best possible outcomes for the environment within the constraints of water sharing plan rules.

The final development of Water Resource Plans under the Basin Plan will allow for further integration of unregulated river inflows and held environmental water licenses.

CWEC supports this process as demonstrating an efficient and sustainable method of managing environmental water across all relevant State and Federal departments and agencies.

The retention of EWAGs and State-held environmental water licenses under the administration of OEH is essential into the future to ensure best available outcomes for river ecosystem health.

Yours faithfully _____

President