

**Submission  
No 69**

## **INQUIRY INTO WATER AUGMENTATION**

**Organisation:** Wakool Landholders Association

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# **Wakool Landholders Association**

**Box 15 Barham 2732**

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## **Submission re Water Augmentation in Rural & Regional NSW**

### **Overview.**

The Wakool Landholders Association represent 350 Landholders in southern NSW. The Landholders in the Wakool District are predominantly irrigators, and water is supplied from Murray Irrigation Limited and the Wakool, Niemur and Edward Rivers.

It is worth noting our irrigation system is a complete gravity system starting from Hume Dam. Murray Irrigation Limited operates the largest and most efficient gravity irrigation scheme in Australia. Murray Irrigation delivery efficiencies are at the highest end of all irrigation systems in Australia and other irrigation providers aspire to be at a similar level in the future.

The Murray Darling Basin Plan has hit us all by shock. In our local Government area there has been over 50% of the water entitlements sold and Murray Irrigation has lost over 27% of their water entitlements. The Plan came at a time when Landholders were at a vulnerable stage. After the millennium drought farmers' profitability was at an all-time low and some were instructed by banks to sell water to repay debt. Many consultants in the area were advising clients to do this with the understanding the temporary water market would be at a price we could all afford. How wrong were they!

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this submission on behalf of the Wakool Landholders Association.

1/. The Wakool Landholders regard forward planning as a priority in the future. Governments tend to make provisions and cater for future needs in so many other sectors that Governments are responsible for, yet no-one has considered future food production and the effects on rural communities. Maybe it is too hard for Government, they haven't the expertise, it is such a touchy issue with community views changing so often it is political suicide to allocate water to grow food, or maybe it is easier to take the less confrontational way and do nothing.

It is such a shame that no government looked into the future when developing the Basin plan. It was all about the environment and no consideration of the productive sector and the impacts on communities.

It is now up to the NSW Government to get serious about water management in the state and mitigate the impacts of the Basin Plan as much as possible. It just doesn't make sense to have water run out to sea for no good reason, when we could achieve most of the environmental targets by getting smarter. Remember the Basin Plan was conceived in an era when the so called experts said it would never rain again.

Now look what's happening with the environment when we are trying to push all this water down through physical chokes that are just not meant to handle these vast amounts of water all year around. It goes against all the things the Basin Plan is supposed to be promoting and no-one is addressing these issues. It makes a mockery of the whole plan and those people putting it together.

2/. The Association feels very strongly about how allocation announcements are made and the level of accuracy of the predictions.

In this day and age, we should expect real time data so individuals can make their own assessments of future water availability. Telemetry has enabled continuous reading of meters therefore it should only be a matter of applying a formula for landholders to make their own call on a daily basis. The departments make a big point of how difficult it is to put together, this should not be the case and if NSW Water can't do it, we better get someone that can.

There is also the issue of transparency when determining how much water NSW gets to allocate. We feel this has not been defined well enough in the past and our Landholders have no confidence in the current process. There is no reason why NSW shouldn't be able to access their share at any time and monitor the inflows accordingly.

3/. Conveyance and loss water has always been misrepresented in the past. It is the Landholders view that this water is not wasted and should be identified as environmental water. The cost of this water should be shared amongst all water users in the states, both rural and urban.

Prior to the construction of dams in our river systems, communities and cities would have no water security and the rivers would quite often run dry. Therefore, conveyance water should be shared by everyone along our rivers and streams and be offset against the flow targets in the basin plan.

We think there should be some real numbers around the conveyance and loss water in the future. The Basin Plan has created enormous change in the farming landscape and the footprint of water users. Water has become the currency for different farming enterprises, the returns per megalitre has become the only measure of farm viability. This does create other issues and problems. The expansion of so called high value crops is happening downstream, away from the water source where soils are better suited to these types of crops.

Is it fair then to have all this water move down the system and expect the conveyance and loss factor remain the same? I suppose this goes back to the long term planning scenario or lack of, we really have made a mess of things. If the conveyance and loss water is regarded as environmental water, then this would be a way of mitigating some of the impacts to other water users. Our forefathers were on the ball developing systems close to the water source to avoid any excessive losses.

This issue has to be resolved because the expansion of these crops is happening at such an alarming rate. If nothing is addressed, we are sending the wrong messages to all Australians.

The extra dilution flows to South Australia that are activated at certain times should be very transparent. Should this be regarded as a loss or an environmental flow? There is so much ambiguity around these flows and now the basin plan is being implemented; are these flows required. Sounds very much like double dipping to our Landholders and maybe an obvious SDL off-set in the future.

Loss water is all part of our water balance. Since the dewatering of areas from the implementation of the Basin Plan we have seen many environmental disbenefits.

Channels and vast areas of farmland have been dried up or piped at an enormous cost. This has created problems the Basin Plan didn't anticipate. Birds and animals have moved on and colonised in completely different areas. A typical example of this is the Ibis rookery around Kerang, birds have left the area because their food source has been modified due to the dewatering of the surrounding farms, where they had a regular food source.

Another example, in the past the environmental flows in some of our smaller creeks and streams were provided by the so called losses in our system, now they have been all individually identified and supplied an environmental flow. So were these flows really losses, we don't think so!

Our Association feel it is essential to have accurate numbers when assessing how much water is in the system for everyone's needs, therefore improving and getting a better understanding of the conveyance and loss water is essential when our landholders are making business decisions in the future. If we had all the figures in front of us, landholders can make their own decisions and not dwell on Government announcements. We are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century so let's get up to speed.

4/. Inter-valley transfers have always been an unproven science. With the implementation of the Basin Plan and the associated recovery targets, the burden and heavy lifting should be shared equally amongst our regions. At present the southern connected system is the target because we are being told this is the only place they can get the water. We feel this is not the case and there should be more scrutiny placed on the so called restrictions in the system.

In the past The Murrumbidgee has always played a minor role in meeting the downstream requirements of South Australia. It is time this is renegotiated and everyone carry their fair share. In a flood the water seems to find its way, so why not in a regulated scenario. Therefore, the rules around the restrictions on inter-valley transfers should be reassessed. We live in this era of water transferability, for good or bad that's not the question but we should make it equitable.

5/. Carryover has been very popular with our Landholders and used primarily as an insurance type initiative. The creators of carryover were very mindful that it did not impede future allocation announcements. This worked well until changes to the water sharing plans in 2004 changed the security of carryover.

As water became so expensive people carrying over water were reluctant to see this water lost if allocations were still below 100%. Therefore, the change was that if the dam is spilling the carryover remained and allocations didn't increase because NSW share of the resource considered carryover in their determination. This scenario creates different outcomes for different Landholders. The Landholders with minimal carryover don't get the increased allocation announcements, they would otherwise get if there weren't the volumes of carryover in the storages.

The Association feel it is the perfect opportunity through this inquiry to re-evaluate carryover and explore a more equitable system that doesn't have unintended impacts for some landholders.

Although we don't want to change any characteristics of the purchased entitlements, it seems unfair that water can be spilling from the dams and the only beneficiary is the environment when the irrigator responsible for the environment retains all their water. No other irrigator has this luxury!

Finally, we have lost so much water in our region, we have to be very mindful that the cost burden on the remaining irrigators becomes too much of a burden. Therefore, the costs that are incurred by our landholders that benefit all in NSW should be apportioned equitably amongst all NSW residents. An example of this in SA is all water users pay MDBA charges, rural and urban. Everyone benefits, everyone should pay their share. This should be replicated in NSW because at present it is so inequitable amongst different water users (Valleys) and all water users in NSW.

Good luck with your inquiry and thank you for the opportunity to submit this submission.

Yours faithfully,

David May (Chairman)