

**Submission  
No 71**

## **INQUIRY INTO WATER AUGMENTATION**

**Organisation:** West Berriquin Irrigators Inc

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## **The Standing Committee Inquiry into the augmentation of water supply for rural and regional New South Wales.**

West Berriquin Irrigators Inc represents around 300 irrigation landholders in the Southern Riverina. Access to reliable and affordable water is essential to all of our business and as such the management of our water resources by NSW government plays a big part in our business lives.

### **Background**

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics, of the 123091 Agricultural business in Australia 32% of them are in the state of NSW. They have also predicted that Australia's population is to double to 46 million by 2075 and New South Wales will see a 35% increase in population from 7.3 million to 9.9 million.

In 2014 – 2015 Aust. Gross Value Agricultural Product was \$53 billion, NSW contributed to 23% of that, equating to \$12 billion. According to ABS the irrigation industry in the NSW Murray is responsible for contributing over \$600 million to the gross irrigated agricultural production of the State. Our region is the heart of irrigated agriculture; we are efficient and innovative managers of water.

Farming business within our organisation are dependent on affordable and accessible water for food and fibre production. According to facts produced by the Ricegrowers association of Australia, 99% of rice grown in Australia is produced in the Murrumbidgee and Murray Valleys, that makes farmers in our region (who a large percentage are rice growers) very important to the state of NSW.

Reports from ABARES show that the 2011-2012 harvest produced 918 000 T (well below our best of 1.2 million), which created \$246 million Gross Value Irrigation Agricultural Production (GVIAP). According to Ricegrowers Aust. Australian rice provides the staple diet for 40 million people every day.

### **Submission**

With this information in mind it would be critical that NSW government have a secure plan in place to meet urban and rural needs. Not just for human consumption, but for food and fibre production, as well as for environmental needs and tourism requirements. Does the NSW government have plans in place for capturing as much rain fall as possible in urban and regional centres to meet those needs? If water storages which were built to store water for food and fibre production are used for other needs then the maximum volumes will not be available to irrigation areas, which provide employment and wealth opportunities to not just our state but the country.

This region has a diverse range of agricultural industries and there is huge potential for value adding industries to increase throughout this region if our water resources are managed with common sense.

## **Management and appropriateness of reporting**

Farmers in our region now more than ever are reliant on accurate, transparent and timely information on water resources, this is an area that needs to be improved by DPI. With such a huge change in the water market now that anyone can own water our growers are at a huge disadvantage. We are finding that this is especially true for our young growers who have few permanent entitlements and are reliant on the temporary water market.

In a recent report by Aither consulting, prepared for the MDBA, they found that the impact of Government water recovery on the temporary water market had increased prices by around 25 percent. However, considering the temporary water prices in 2015 we believe that this could be far greater. This combined with more sophisticated players in the market including investment companies and corporate agriculture has put the average family farmer at a disadvantage with limited time and resources to devote to constantly monitoring the market.

Our community needs a better understanding of the complicated rules that are associated to with the Water Sharing Plans. Water sharing plans were initially implemented in 2004 at the start of the millennium drought. In the NSW Murray it was suspended in 2006 due to drought and not reinstated until 2011 after the drought broke. The Water Sharing Plan has recently been rewritten with a new plan implemented from 1 July 2016. Water ownership has changed dramatically in this time. Since 1995 NSW Murray alone has lost 1133 GL of productive water entitlements to environmental flows through different recovery projects. This has put a strain on the productivity of our region.

Our farmers are confused by the rules, and finding DPI personnel to come to our region where we are most greatly impacted is difficult. Earlier in the year our group won a grant to host a water information evening, on several occasions through phone calls and emails we attempted to get someone from DPI to speak to our irrigators about Water sharing plans and changes to these plans over the past few years that impact our area. This is one area that our irrigators say that they don't fully understand and would like more information about Water Sharing Plans and rules. In the end we gave up trying as we were continuously passed onto another department.

## **Consultation**

The Murray Darling Basin Plan has resulted in the reduction in available productive water resources by 28% in our region, hugely impacting the productivity of this region and therefore the state of NSW. DPI Water has been given the task to "consult" on Sustainable Diversion Limits projects and the Constraints Management Strategy, in this task we believe that DPI Water has failed. If NSW are serious about their ambitions to increase agricultural productivity by 30% then they need to work with grassroots experts in land and water management to provide solutions to the amount of water which is being forced through our systems to "fix" end of system problems. If NSW was serious they would work / insist that South Australia provide solutions to their own problems, that been that the Coorong, Lower Lakes and the Murray Mouth are no longer estuarine systems which they once were. NSW should not be expected to fix the state of SA's problems.

## **Conclusion**

The members of our organisation want to be productive, we are world leaders in irrigation practices and carefully manage our land and water. But we cannot continue on this destructive path, water has become a political bargaining tool, it is an input not a commodity.

There are many methods that can be used with today's technological advances that will allow this state to manage water effectively so that there is enough for domestic supply, productive use, tourism and environmental needs, we just need the political willpower to think outside the square.

We believe that there has been a serious lack in management and planning by the NSW Government in water policy which has been ongoing for a number of decades. Water management in NSW is critical to the states future and every attempt must be made to work with those most greatly impacted to help provide the solutions to our long term security.