

**Submission
No 61**

INQUIRY INTO WATER AUGMENTATION

Organisation: Broken Hill City Council

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Broken Hill City Council

...a safe, vibrant, prosperous and culturally rich City achieved through community leadership and sustainable management.

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WC:LJB

Mayor Wincen Cuy

Please address all communications to:
The General Manager,
240 Blende Street,
P.O.Box 448,
BROKEN HILL NSW 2880
Telephone: (08) 8080 3300
Fax: (08) 8080 3424
ABN: 84873116132
Email: council@brokenhill.nsw.gov.au
Website: www.brokenhill.nsw.gov.au

August 12, 2016

The Hon Robert Brown MLC
Chairperson
Upper House Inquiry – Water Augmentation
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000
gpscno5@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Senator,

Upper House Inquiry - Augmentation of Water Supply for Rural and Regional New South Wales

On behalf of the Broken Hill community and Far West Region I present the following submission to the Upper House Inquiry into the augmentation of water supply for rural and regional New South Wales.

Broken Hill is one of Australia's iconic cities, in fact we hold the significant honour of being named Australia's First Heritage Listed City.

Broken Hill and the Far West NSW region has provided significant wealth to both NSW and the Commonwealth through 130 years of mining. As an isolated community we are resilient, innovative and face the many challenges you would expect in this area head-on.

One of our greatest challenges during our proud history has been that of water. Our existence and our capacity to grow and thrive as a city has been reliant on the Darling River System and importantly since the 1950s the Menindee Lakes Scheme. So it has been with great community angst that we have had to fight so hard to ensure a permanent and sufficient surface water drinking supply for our region since the release of flows from the Lakes Scheme in late 2013.

Since the inception of the Menindee Lakes Scheme, we have seen the highs and lows during times of severe drought through to major floods. However during these peaks and troughs we have almost been guaranteed a surface water supply. That is no longer the case and we are now at critical storage levels with Broken Hill water supply now to be supplemented by a pipeline from the Murray River which is generally supported by the community, and emergency bore water – which is not supported in any form as a long term solution to our water needs.

The Menindee Lakes scheme is of vital importance to our economic, social and cultural fabric as a city and a region. In Broken Hill alone some 19,000 people are reliant on that scheme to provide the basic water necessities that would be taken for granted in any other city of a similar size and population.

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The Broken Hill City Council provides the following as the basis for our submission.

Although we are currently experiencing a small fresh water flow into the Menindee Lakes System, this will only temporarily raise levels above the critical minimum level of 18 months that Broken Hill has been experiencing and due to this, Council expresses its strong concern to the Upper House General Purpose Standing Committee about the excessive and unnecessary release of water in late 2013 which has allowed this situation to occur much earlier than it otherwise would have done. Further, Council strongly rejects the view that underground water supplies, such as from bores or aquifers, can ever be used to undermine Broken Hill's right to source its supply of water from a surface storage.

That Council put forward the following, to the Upper House General Purpose Standing Committee:

1. That Council requests a thorough review of the current "trigger point" for NSW Government control of the Menindee Lakes system. That the trigger point should be set at a minimum of 640 GL for NSW control and above 800GL before Murray-Darling Basin Authority can have access to a call on water releases.
2. That any trigger point is based on accessing retrievable water.
3. That a surface water drinking supply is guaranteed for the Broken Hill and Menindee communities.
4. That the Murray-Darling Basin Authority acknowledge that the Menindee Lakes system and a healthy Darling River are vital assets for the on-going liveability, economic prosperity and recreational needs of Broken Hill and the Far West and it will continue to work with communities to ensure the long term viability and security of the river and the Menindee Lakes .
5. That any changes to the Menindee Lakes system or the implementation of emergency provisions are done at no additional or on-going cost to the Broken Hill community.
6. That the community is properly consulted and informed about the implications for them of the proposed pipeline from the Murray River including any additional cost impost proposed. It is noted that the government undertook to provide the community with the business case for the water supply options but this has not been received at the time of writing this submission.
7. That the NSW government announces a start date for commencement of the agreed works (outlet regulator from Menindee and Block Dam between Lake Menindee and Lake Cawndilla) as per the NSW Government MOU (signed July 2010 by the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard and the Premier of NSW Kristina Keneally MP) and the necessity for the construction of a channel to connect Lake Cawndilla to the Darling River.

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8. That the NSW Government supports the nomination of the Menindee Lakes as a RAMSAR / iconic site. It is noted that while there exist a number of iconic sites and RAMSAR sites along the Murray River there is not one along the Darling River. Council believes that the environmental values and the significance of the Menindee Lakes as a wild bird refuge amply justifies their inclusion. The tourism value of this inclusion to the Far West would be significant.

Council's position remains focussed on a secure surface water supply for our region. It is critical our voice is heard as a community.

Yours faithfully,

WINCEN CUY
MAYOR