

**Submission
No 104**

INQUIRY INTO WATER AUGMENTATION

Organisation: Barham Irrigation Dairy Farmer

Date received: 1 March 2017

Draft Submission re; - Water Augmentation in Rural & Regional NSW.

Overview;

I would like the opportunity to be able to present and speak to a submission that I'm preparing for the Inquiry into the augmentation of water supply for rural and regional New South Wales.

I live at Barham, I'm a former Wakool shire councilor and current LRC member of the New Murray River Council, I'm also chair of a local private irrigation scheme (Eagle Creek Pumping Syndicate Inc) and Barham Land Care Inc. I have an extensive knowledge of the southern irrigation and dairy industry dating back to the seventies.

Last year I brought an additional 300 ML of permanent NSW GS water in an attempt to offset the impact of the water reform process, which has had a massive negative impact on my long term irrigation water security. The investment required a significant increase to our overdraft at a time of extreme produce and water volatility, I have serious concerns about where the next generation of farmers will come from.

Issues that need consideration;

The changes to water supply policy over the last 30 years has reduced the long term security of General Security irrigation water by approximately 20 to 25 percent, currently reliability is about 60%, it was 85% -(in fact from 2000 the average is about 55%). Additionally many farmers through the millennium drought sold down their water entitlement (water buy back scheme) to relieve financial pressure, they are now dependant on the highly volatile temporary water market which effectively has added another input cost line to their farming business. I fear for many as their reliance on temporary water may be the straw that breaks the Camel's back. Temporary water has traded from \$30 to \$300 since 2015.

Many farmers surrender water entitlement to participated in the Infrastructure up grade Scheme to improve on farm productivity with less water, the effect of this strategy is that it enabled farms to maintain production at similar levels with less water but in reality the farm business has not really grown. Generally, when you invest in capital improvements the objective is to grow your business. It's my view that farmers would have been better off funding their own capital works program and using the water savings to grow their business, in fact some farmers that took part in the above scheme are now trying to buy back permanent water entitlement in order to grow their business. Remember these farms have already had a reduction of their water entitlement by about 25%.

The primary cause of the reduction in water security has been our state Government conceding far too much of our water, to appease South Australia's constant demand for ever increasing the end of river flows. Most of the problems with the Murray River in SA emanate from within SA.

Examples are;

- diversion of local flows through the Coorong now flow directly out to sea,
- very little SA catchment water flows through the Coorong,
- the barrages that maintain a marine estuary as a fresh water lake system,
- operational management of the barrages that restrict flows through the river mouth,
- SA saline water quality issues are largely emanating from within SA.
- SA original share of the water storages was 3/13's it is now 1/3
- SA now get all its water long before the eastern states NSW - GS irrigators

SA insistence to maintain the lower lakes as fresh water lakes is their business, but it should not be at the expense of NSW rural communities and farmers. I appeal to all NSW political parties and parliamentary members to start and look after the farming and rural communities that live to the west of the Blue Mountains, we are an important part of the NSW economy.

I appeal to the media based east of the Blue Mountains to develop a better understanding of socio economic impacts of the current MDBP and to also report on negative impact that the plan is having west of the Blue Mountains. For example the massive reduction in school pupil numbers that reflect the population decline and subsequent reduction in services.

There appears to be a lack transparency around the issue of water trading and of the process leading to the release of environmental water to the temporary market. There needs to be more clarity of the triggers and process that leads to environmental water being released to the temporary water market. The later announcements of full water allocations this year made it difficult to know/plan the right farming program to maximize the season ahead.

The current carryover rules are in need of a serious over haul, it's totally unacceptable to have Hume weir spilling and yet no carryover water is lost (both private and environmental). The carryover water should be the first water spilled as the dam rises. The carryover water is actually taking up the space of some ones permanent annual entitlement, in effect that space is on loan until the dam fills again. When the space of the holder of the annual entitlement is filled with new season water the carryover will rise to the top of the dam and then spill. The only reason that carryover can exist is a result of low inflows to the dam.

The following are three current examples of why Public consultation must be genuine;

The Koondrook Perricoota Flood Enhancement Project, Construction started in 2009.

The objective is to use environmental water to enhance the sustainability of the forest with a levy around the perimeter of the forest, there are four large regulators at the bottom of the scheme to hold the water in the forest. The project was designed to hold about 300,000 ML of water and had strong local support. The community expressed concern about the downstream flood impact when the water is release and suggested that if the downstream flooding issue where fixed the levy may not be required. Forestry indicated that the downstream issues would be sorted our once the project was completed. The project on completion has cost approx \$80 to maybe \$120 million.

Forestry has now commented on the modeling of the proposed solutions to manage the downstream flooding issue. If the proposal is adopted, Forestry has indicated that most of the new structure may not be necessary as the flow rate through the Forest should spread sufficiently without the regulators being closed. The local community should have been taken seriously and the tax dollars could have been saved.

Barham Town Flood study, conducted by Wakool and now the Murray River Council;

The objective was to evaluate and enhance the Barham flood levy. The standard set by the state Government is that all town levies should have 600mm of freeboard above the 1 in 100 year flood. Early estimates for a town levy to meet the 600mm standard is \$9 million. While in special case the Gov't could grant an exemption to the above rule, the local community reps argued that 300mm above the 1 in 100 flood level would be sufficient for Barham. The reason for this is that the majority of the flood water travels through the forest to north of Barham, Barham has never flooded.

Four years on and finally the consultants conducting the flood study have agreed that 300mm above the 1 in 100 year flood is more than adequate freeboard for a Barham flood levy. The reason for the change was that the local 2016 flood event clearly demonstrated the points that local community members had been trying to make and the numbers speak for themselves, Torrumbarry weir 65 km upstream of Barham had a flood peak flow of 67,000 ML per day while Braham only peaked at 32,000 ML per day with the balance flowing through the Koondrook Perricoota forest.

WaterNSW installation of Sontek flow meter into open cutting that delivers Eagle Creek pumping Syndicate(ECPS).

The objective was to upgrade the ECPS metering system to meet the new national metering standard. Agreement was reached between the two parties to trial the installation of a Sontek open channel meter about 3 years ago with the understanding that the meter would only be endorsed as the official meter when both parties were in agreement on the meters performance. From the outset the Sontek meter recorded ECPS water usage at 15% to 25% higher than our historical water usage. On the 1st July 2015 WaterNSW informed the ECPS that the Sontek meter had now been commissioned and that the metering issue was now closed. ECPS had at no stage agreed to the commissioning.

The ECPS sort independent engineering advice. The advice suggested that the ECPS pump was simply incapable of pumping that amount of water. ECPS also tried an alternative magflow style meter which recorded similar water use to that of the original metering system, ECPS rejected the use of the Sontek meter and offered to install Magflow meters at the expense of ECPS (Magflow meters are the most commonly used meters along NSW rivers). WaterNSW has now backed off and acknowledged that the Sontek meter doesn't work. ECPS is now waiting for another meeting with WaterNSW to work towards resolution of the acceptable metering system for the ECPS. Local knowledge needs recognition.

Public consultation of rural communities must be genuine and must improve.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you. - Alan Mathers.