

**Submission
No 115**

INQUIRY INTO WATER AUGMENTATION

Organisation: Ballina Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd

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SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY ENQUIRY INTO WATER SUPPLY IN COUNTRY AREAS

Dear Sirs,

My role as the Chief Executive Officer of Ballina Fishermen's Cooperative Ltd which represents 30 Commercial Fishermen on the North Coast of New South Wales I manage many of the variables within our industry, water being a major component, as this is where we catch our fish (and other species).

Many may believe that water is water and fish come from the ocean not from rivers & streams, however ultimately water starts from the ocean, falls on the land and is returned to the ocean through a number of avenues. It is the method of return that determines the value of the returned water.

On the North Coast, particularly from the Clarence valley through to the Tweed valley there is an abundance of water returning to the ocean from The Clarence River, Richmond/Wilson Rivers, Brunswick & Tweed Rivers. Each of these river systems have formed over thousands of years building individual ecosystems as they have developed.

The arrival of rapid change to these systems has created an imbalance causing un-natural consequences, usually at the expense of an ecosystem or species of fish. The rapid changes I speak of, are Man-made development, from land clearing, introduction of domestic animals, plants and construction of water management systems.

Consequences of the introduction of these developments are the changes to the river systems, plants and animals have changed the water quality, water management systems either hold the water slowing the flows or increase the flows, or drain the land, ultimately effecting the ecosystem.

The ecosystem is ultimately the breeding ground for a number of fresh water and salt water fish & crab species, including the microscopic creatures that fish feed on that sustains our business.

One of the tasks I pursue is the rehabilitation of the land systems to improve the water quality in each of the systems.

Over the last 200 hundred years' developments within the river catchments including the flood plains have been at the expense of the rivers, water diversion ultimately slows the river causing siltation, land clearing removes the filtration systems and increases soil erosion. Pasture grasses are good to feed domestic animals but quickly reduce the oxygen levels in water when flooded for a short period. Drained wet lands destroys marine life habitat and increases potential damage when acid-sulphate soils are exposed.

Our efforts to limit destruction of the waterways and the water carried within those water ways are constrained by:

- Lack of any Agency or Local Government willing to take responsibility.
- Lack of a Central control when a waterway traverses several jurisdictions both state & Local government.

- Lack of Resources within various agencies willing to control particular areas within catchments.
- Lack of will from Agencies to address problems
- Lack of management plans over assets that impact river systems.
- Lack of compliance mechanisms.
- Conflict of uses
- Poor Local Government Planning
- Minimal funding for rehabilitation work.

The North Coast also is effected by an oversupply of water within the catchment form time to time. impacting residences and business who for economic reasons placed themselves within the extended flood plain zones.

As recent flooding in the Wilson/Richmond river catchment has shown water levels after a rain event are not as predictable as we were led to believe. Local discussion after the event has suggested increasing the height of existing levees to increase protection/limit losses, however this will only expand the impact on areas outside the current levee protection zones and does little to ensure those who choose to live/work in the danger zone are aware of the potential economic and human cost.

There are no short simple answers, the governments task together with a multitude of others will need to restore a balance to the ecosystem while catering to the demands for use of the Land and Ocean in a change climate environment.

Good Luck.

Phillip Hilliard
Chief Executive Officer
Ballina Fishermens Co-operative Ltd