

**REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT**

**INQUIRY INTO ASPECTS OF AGRICULTURE IN NEW SOUTH  
WALES**

**Uncorrected Proof**

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**Public forum at Leeton Soldiers Club, Leeton,  
on Wednesday 12 September 2007 at 5.00 p.m.**

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**PRESENT**

The Hon. A. Catanzariti (Chair)

Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile

The Hon. M. J. Pavey

The Hon. C. M. Robertson

The Hon. M. S. Veitch

**ALSO PRESENT:**

John Chant and John Fulton

**CHAIR:** Welcome all to this public forum of the Standing Committee on State Development. This inquiry is into aspects of agriculture in New South Wales. The inquiry will examine the contribution of agriculture to the New South Wales economy, the impediments to sustaining appropriate levels of productivity, capacity and growth and initiatives to address those impediments. This public forum is intended to allow members of the community to raise issues of interest to them. If you have not registered to speak but would like to, please see one of the staff members and they will add your name to the list. When speaking please keep your comments brief and to the point to give everyone the chance to speak. Committee members may ask questions to follow up your points.

Before we commence I would like to make some comments about aspects of the hearing. Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections about others. Protections are afforded to committee witnesses under parliamentary privilege and should not be abused during these forums. I therefore request that witnesses avoid the mention of other individuals unless it is absolutely essential to address the terms of reference. Finally, could everyone please turn off their mobile phones, including mobile phones on silent because they still interfere with Hansard's recording of the proceedings.

**Mr CHANT:** I have lived in Leeton since 1973. I was in the Murrumbidgee area for five years before, living at Darlington Point, which is not very far from here. During that time I have been involved in the irrigation industry in the administrative body that operates the irrigation schemes. I have been involved in water administration since 1968.

As part of my early grounding in water administration, I took the opportunity of working on a variety of irrigation farms in the area. Being raised in Bondi did not give me much exposure to the country or to irrigation in particular. I thought it was essential if I was to do justice to my chosen career that I understood something about being on a farm. I have a great passion for this town as our adopted home. We are in the process of building our retirement home here. We have retired here, inasmuch not going to work five days a week is retirement, and we will be spending the remainder of our lives here because we like the place. We like it because of its closeness and prosperity. That prosperity comes from only one source—water. Irrigated agriculture makes 500-acre blocks viable and 2,000-acre blocks profitable, providing there is water.

I am sure that the representatives of the local council would have made the Committee aware of the situation with industry in this town. I read with some enjoyment the Department of the Environment and Climate Change submission to the inquiry, which referred to between 10 and 15 per cent of the population being involved in agriculture. Let me assure the Committee that the percentages in Leeton, Griffith and the surrounding areas are substantially more than that in direct employment in agriculture and the spin-offs. My last count of the businesses in Leeton revealed more than 140 businesses, and most of them you cannot see. They all employ people—some employ many and some do not. However, 140 non-farming businesses operate within the boundaries of this town, which we are told is home to only 6,400 people. None of those businesses or people would be here if it were not for irrigation. Prior to irrigation, only 40-odd people lived in the area on broadacre farms.

One of our greatest concerns at the moment is obviously with the immediate lack of water because of the current drought. That is one of the reasons we strongly supported the New South Wales Government working with Snowy Hydro Limited to conduct a cloud seeding trial to make snow in the Snowy Mountains. What is the Government's view about the continuation and potential expansion of cloud seeding to provide water sources for our storages so that rural Australia can return to the level of dependence on water it had in the past, while incorporating the efficiencies that have been built in?

We are at the stage where towns are without enough water. That is potentially a time when the population tends to mobilise itself and move towards the coast. I do not think you need any more people on the coast, particularly not in New South Wales—there are too many there now. I would like the Committee's views on that. I would like to ask some questions about the Government's and the Committee's views on sustaining rural towns, and remote towns in particular.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. I appreciate that you want to ask Committee members some questions, and we probably have different views from a political point of view. Perhaps you might tell us your views on cloud seeding and how you think it would be of benefit to the economy of New South Wales, particularly the irrigators of New South Wales.

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** Are you speaking about cloud seeding in the Snowy Mountains or in general?

**Mr CHANT:** Our support is specifically for the Snow Mountains scheme and only for seeding for snow, not for rain. As a resident I support anything that will create additional runoff that does not steal someone else's water, whether that be through efficiencies or the creation of rain that might not have otherwise come or by the creation of snow in the Snowy scheme. Why would we not support it? The costs we are imposing on communities now because of lack of water are immeasurable. I do not know whether members have driven around town. It looks pretty good at the moment. Underlying that is the fact that many people do not have enough money to continue their current pursuits, either in business or keeping their family together. Members should have a look at the for sale signs on the houses around town. I have never experienced that in the time that I have been here. People used to have to battle to find a home to buy, and now they are in every street. That is a direct consequence of low water availability resulting in lower levels of production of crops that sustain the food processing industries in these areas.

I work for Murrumbidgee Irrigation Limited, which the Committee heard today. We support the improvement in catchment yield through cloud seeding, providing it can be demonstrated that it is not pinching someone else's rain. Snowy Hydro Limited is investing a substantial amount in the trial at the moment, but I understand it is talking about \$20 million or \$30 million for a five-year program. That is chicken feed compared to the cost of the damage being caused. If Snowy Hydro can get a 10 per cent yield improvement in the Snowy storages, these towns can continue to water and to live relatively comfortably, and our production will be maintained.

The average area irrigated in this region each year is 130,000 hectares. This year it will be about 30,000 hectares and it will predominantly involve permanent plantings

such as grapes, citrus and nut trees. There will not be a summer season. There was going to be a summer season of wheat, but because of the lack of follow-up rains and a shortage or artificial water for irrigation almost the entire winter crop that was sown has been lost. I have no idea how much that will cost. However, compared to \$25 million or \$30 million for a research, it is nothing.

This community has also lost some of its community facilities. At the moment a lot of the clubs in Leeton—there were a series of small clubs—have gone the way of many other small clubs. But it has been more marked here because there are not a lot of clubs. We currently have lost one, we have one that is about to amalgamate with this club, and we have another one that is about to close. That will leave two clubs in Leeton and one at Yanco. It is just a direct result of the malaise in the community as a result of there not being enough money to go around.

So if we can increase the yield of water at the same time as we increase the efficiency and use of it, get a bit more wealth into the community and get people back at work where they were, these towns will recover and they will bounce back. I think it is only six years ago when four towns had an increase in local gross domestic product [GDP] in New South Wales. They were the four irrigation towns—Narrabri, Moree, Deniliquin and Griffith. Leeton was not big enough to be considered in that, but it would also have had an increase. Those towns would now be the four towns that are going backwards quicker than anyone else.

**CHAIR:** Mr Chant, at the moment the Committee is gathering information so that it can prepare a report for the Government, with certain recommendations. We are asking people to forums such as this—and we were hoping to get a few more people than we got—to obtain their views about what they think should happen, particularly on the agricultural scene. We are hoping to make recommendations from the information that is gathered from these people and from those who have made submissions and who have already appeared before the Committee.

We intend to report to Parliament by early November. The report will come out and obviously anybody who has spoken, attended a forum, taken part in a forum, or taken part in the inquiry, will also receive a report. We are keen to get as much information as we possibly can. I wish to ask you a question regarding cloud seeding. Do you know what sorts of surveys are available and how successful have been any of the trials that have occurred so far? What can you tell us about them?

**Mr CHANT:** I think the information that is coming out of the trials so far is commercial in confidence to participants. But the anecdotal evidence that comes from people who are on the ground operating them and observing them is that there is about a 10 per cent increase in snow yield. It does not equate directly to a 10 per cent run-off yield because you have the snow on the mountains, you still have to get it to run into the dams and it can evaporate. But if you can consistently get a figure of 10 per cent more snow, on average you will get a greater level of run off. Other than that, I do not think there is any public information. It may be that the New South Wales Government has some reporting relationship with Snowy Hydro, but we have only been made aware of the anecdotal evidence.

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** Just for interest's sake, we are all from the country. Every one of us is from a different part of the State. Do you have any

ideas about the maintenance of country towns, or do you know exactly what that means?

**Mr CHANT:** I think the real appreciation people need in a town of 6,000 people like Leeton is that if you take it away from the irrigation area it is a dramatically different environment and it is a dramatically different town. It would have substantially lower levels of community wealth and, thereby, substantially lower levels of community amenity. If people understand that these irrigation towns are the way they are only because of the water, you have a very strong foundation for looking at how you help them sustain through periods of water shortage. I do not say that you can create water but you should recognise that water adds so much inherent value in normal times and when it is not there the effect is dramatically increased over what it would be in a town that is running at a different level.

I know, and no doubt you people would know, a lot of the rural towns in New South Wales. Many of them do not have substantial irrigation around them and they are about the size of Leeton and perhaps even up to the size of Griffith. At the moment they are poor towns. They are all poor towns. They are towns that could not boast of having 140 businesses that you cannot see, let alone the businesses that you see in the main street, and the factories. I spend a fair bit of time in places like Yass and, in particular, Goulburn.

Everyone says that Goulburn is super dry. It has its water; it just does not have quite as much as other people. But it has nothing like the industry that this town has and it is multiples the size of this town. I think the first thing for people to regulate and for governments to be made aware of is that these towns suffer dramatically when the base is pulled from under them, and the base is water. All this wealth and all these community facilities are the direct product of water. I think that about 40 or 50 per cent of people rely pretty strongly on it for their very being.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Do you have any other recommendations that you would make? You said that there is a serious problem and you referred to the impact that the lack of water is having on the town.

**Mr CHANT:** I suppose the greatest difficulty that we have is getting started. None of us are really good social actors. We have a good community, we have good counselling facilities and we have reasonable health facilities, but we do not have the skills in being proactive about getting amongst the community and placing help. I suppose it is like a lot of isolated communities; you just remain isolated until it blows up. There is no skill in invading the community, finding out where are all the deep pockets of despair, doing something about that, and putting businesses together where they are not competing but are helping each other through the tough times.

It is a little alien to our nature. I think it is also a little alien to the Australian nature, but with a greater level of skill in that area in our local community I think we may improve people's ability to pull themselves through. It is very difficult to find alternative things to do in towns like this when agriculture is on the rocks. When we talk about the situation in irrigation towns and communities do not think for one minute that we do not bleed for our dry area community. Like most people they are eating the paint off the wall.

They are in desperate trouble to the extent that many of those farmers will just be vacating their farms, and they are not very far from this town once you get outside the influence of the channel system. This is a strong community and it is strong enough to support those people, if it remains strong. I do not know how we do it but I think our community has the people. They probably just need the skills to be proactive and to pick up people before it is too late.

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** Have you had anything to do with community development type projects?

**Mr CHANT:** I am not sure that we have ever needed them. These communities are inherently wealthy when there is water about. There are schemes that I can go back to but that some of you would not be able to. They are usually for other places. They are probably used in other places but not in Leeton because everyone had the employment and the wealth that they needed.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Would you need any help from outside, from government or from other areas?

**Mr CHANT:** I think government might be able to organise for people who are skilled to get into the community when they probably do not want you to and they do not realise that they are in trouble. We need early intervention in the community from some of our counselling or caring organisations. There are some wonderful people here. I have used them when I have struck people who have been in trouble and who cannot handle themselves. There are only a few of them and there is such a great need at the moment. I do not know whether much of Australia has been through what we are going through in agriculture. I am not sure about that. The ones that have would be quite old now. Young people who have invested enormous amounts of money in farms are in desperate straits.

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** We met one of those farmers today who invested a lot—smart environmental investments—to get a better return on his property. But he has a nil water allocation and it is a difficult situation for him. Do you have any data or statistics that show basically how many farmers are at the end of the rope?

**Mr CHANT:** No, we do not. Because of the business we run it is not something that we have ever addressed, and it is not something that we are competent to address. We look at our debtors' list, people buying water from us, which shows whether or not they are paying. Whereas in the past we used to be able to judge how people were going by the strength of our debtors' list, it is more difficult now because people have elevated us up the paying list. They realise the importance of not having to wrestle with us over money when they want water. No, I do not have any data. We really are system operators, water delivery operators, trying to do our little bit, but we are certainly not skilled or practised in dealing with these sorts of issues.

**CHAIR:** In your opinion what could government do better to try to maintain a sustainable agricultural irrigated industry in particular areas such as this? In your opinion what can be done?

**Mr CHANT:** I appreciate what governments are doing and the relief packages that they are giving. However, they might want to kick in a bit earlier. People are in a downward motion or they are still on the recovery path. Sometimes those assistance packages cut out a bit early or they do not start soon enough. I suppose we are all waiting until the rain comes so that we do not have to do that, but perhaps the Government could be alerted to that. I think there is a role for government in not letting a community come crashing down around people who are in trouble, not letting the towns become vacant lots up the main street, and making sure that the councils are well equipped to carry out the care role that they have for their community. That may mean providing some grants to councils, or some skills to councils, so that they can get out and do some of those extra social things that might need to be done, or provide them to other relief organisations that are in town.

All the towns have them. Perhaps governments do that and I do not know about it. I am not in any way critical of any governments because I think they realise that something has to be done. But when you think of our experiences last year, some would say that the Government was a little tired in responding to the cut in water allocations, and a little mean.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** This morning the mayor painted a serious picture, just as you have. I am wondering whether it is such a dramatic situation that the Government should consider sacrificing environmental flows and so on. I know that it is trying to keep a balance with water for agriculture and water for the environment, but if no towns are left there is not much point in having some water running down the Snowy River. Do you think it is so serious that the Government should reconsider its policies in that regard, as an emergency plan for a year, two years or three years?

**Mr CHANT:** I have been strongly for the irrigation community. I do not want to be taken wrongly. I think we have had a good relationship between the irrigation community and the environmental community in the Murrumbidgee. I am pretty sure we have. The environmental community agreed to not claim environmentally reserved water until irrigation had certain levels of allocation. That was not in one of the current water sharing plans but the first water sharing plan for the Murrumbidgee. It was a very pragmatic approach that they adopted and we were very appreciative of that. I might be so unkind to suggest that the flow regime that is applied to Burrinjuck Dam—they call it the translucent flow regime—was probably agreed to with the memory of the 30 years of rain through the 1970s and 1980s and may not be appropriate for the 30 years of dry that we are in. Perhaps that translucent flow regime, which provides credit to the environmental account predominantly over the winter, might be reviewed whether it is a bit generous to the environment at that time or a bit scary in times of continuing drought. We have to still care for our river system, particularly for the riverine environment. We are starting to do that a bit smarter. People are suddenly starting to accept that you do not have to fully fill a river to get water out of the billabong. You can pump it there and piggyback on top of flows when they come, rather than releasing artificial flows all the time. We are becoming a lot wiser. I would not advocate suspending environmental flows, but I would certainly advocate the community coming together to talk about ways of dealing with it better and perhaps having a look at whether it might be able to be borrowed in advance of better times for looking after towns and production, particularly high-value production, which we could well lose. I would not say it should not disappear altogether. An essential part of living in the bush is having a decent riverine environment. We get our water out of the river too.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing and for your contribution this afternoon. We will make sure you get a copy of the report.

**(Mr Chant withdrew)**



**CHAIR:** The next speaker is Mr Fulton. Would you please give us your full name?

**Mr FULTON:** I am Alfred John Fulton, formally known as John. That is the problem of my two grandfathers and my parents.

**CHAIR:** And you are proud of that.

**Mr FULTON:** Of course.

**CHAIR:** Could you give us a brief outline on your thoughts on our inquiry?

**Mr FULTON:** Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I am very conscious of what John Chant was saying. I would wholeheartedly agree with nearly all of the comments that John was making. He is a very well renowned person in Murrumbidgee Irrigation Limited and has been with the irrigation industry for longer than he cares to remember. With that experience he can speak with a voice that should be taken note of. I suppose it follows that I have been around far too long too and my experience, ladies and gentlemen, is one of a semi-retired agent, stock and station, real estate, auctioneering. I was bought out of my business, which I started in 1970. Prior to that I had been farming and dealing and prior to that I had been in my father's agency in real estate and valuation business. I am still under the 1975 Act a registered practising valuer. That makes me say to you people that, yes, I have been valuing these broad hectares, these acres for a very, very long time, as well as selling them.

Besides that, I have been a community-involved and interested person. I have served two terms on Leeton Shire Council, one term, in the old language, as Deputy Shire President. The community service has been rendered in other forms as well. I will not go into that. I believe that you have inquired into that. I heard somebody say that our Mayor Maytom has been here this morning and he would have undoubtedly filled you in on Leeton Shire Council. With that I do wear some other hats. I am the Chairman of the Murrumbidgee Electorate Council of the National Party, I am the Chairman of Leeton Shire Council's Heritage Committee, I am the Vice-Chairman of the newly enlarged and beautiful modern library of Leeton Shire Council. Those things I started when last on council, I said to the Mayor and other people that I would continue with that service because of the interest. I was also on council the representative of council and trustee of the Fivebough and Tuckerbil wetlands. I hear on today's news that we have got a big bird show coming up again this year. That is for community involvement.

I make the point about the Fivebough wetlands—and this is what angers me when I get in the company of ignorant people—that we are making a world-renowned wetlands out of our waste water. That is how much we value our water. That is now a Ramsar-listed occasion. We have it annually and we have our visitors. The other thing, and I have got it in my pocket, we recently had at the council's Heritage Committee the doctor who is doing the breeding at the Yanco farm at the present time, Russell Reineke. We had Russell in there on the basis of what we had learned about he being the keeper of our rice industry heritage of seed, hence this document. It goes into the DNA of all the rice seed that has been grown in this area since, I suppose, it is fair to say, 1928. That is excusing what they did down on the Murray—that is another matter. Russell was telling my Heritage Committee the other day that he is growing most of the

varieties about every five years to keep fresh the stocks of that rice. That rice, of course, does have certain DNA qualities, which is most important to John Chant's Murrumbidgee Irrigation Limited, most important to our economy and more important, probably, to the whole economic circumstances of Deniliquin, Coleambally, Leeton and Griffith.

**CHAIR:** Do you have the title of that document?

**Mr FULTON:** I will show it to you.

**CHAIR:** It is from the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries by Russell Reineke and Peter Snell, Rice Breeders, Yanco Agricultural Institute, private mailbag Yanco New South Wales 2703. The telephone number is 0269512611.

**Mr FULTON:** I mention this for a specific reason and that is another thing I have come across in my lifetime in Victoria, New South Wales and elsewhere, even overseas—the amount of water that is utilised to grow rice. I have known about this for some years of course—we have cut since I was a child our water usage on rice by at least half. We are now more than doubling our rice yield per hectare, per acre, whichever language you prefer. We have more than doubled that and using less water. The interesting point about the document I have just shown you is that it is about rice seed preserved for mild climate, temperate climate, not for torrential rain in the equatorial regions. People seem to get that mixed up in their ignorance. We are a temperate climate and that is the rice that we grow. We are most conscious of the water usage.

Russell Reineke is on the track. He is quite confident that in the very near future we will overcome what is disastrous for growing a rice crop, that is, a cold snap around the Christmas period, which can interfere with the panicle initiation of the plant when it is making and forming its little head. If Russell and other scientists around the world are successful in coming up with a variety of rice that the customer is quite happy eating around the world—and we could be leading because it is beyond dispute that we lead the world in rice production, quality of rice and all the innovation of the rice industry, and I could probably keep you going for a day and a half on that—in the near future it is hoped that instead of keeping flooded bays to grow our rice by aerial agriculture and like application, we may be back, according to Russell, where we only wet the land periodically to keep the land damp while the rice plant is growing. John Chant will be happy with this. The plant will take no notice if we get a cold snap at Christmas. It will still do the panicle initiation, and it will still produce rice that the customer wants to eat. The cocky will be able to get a tonnage return for his other expenses and everybody will be a lot happier. I am not saying that everybody will be growing that type of rice because there might not be the customers that we have historically kept around the world to eat that certain type of rice. But that is the way our doctors, our scientists are headed. We have not been asleep on the job. We have been heading down this track for a long, long time. As you would know, Mr Chairman, you do not come up with new varieties overnight. It can take decades in some instances.

Mr Chairman, as I said earlier, I am a registered valuer. I overheard John Chant's comments about the disastrous state that we are in now. I forecast this for some year or two—it does not matter—that unless the water is there disaster will strike. In fact, disaster has struck and you have got closures already in Leeton, you have got imminent

closures in Griffith and there are a lot more, Mr Chairman, that you would know about. I am guilty of having an article in yesterday's *Irrigator*, which did cover some of the aspects that John Chant talked about. Of course, as some of you may know, I am a longstanding advocate. I think the Reverend Nile touched on this of more dams, bigger dams and online storages. For the life of me I cannot understand why the Government and the media do not accept the simple fact that the welfare of Sydney people at the present time that we speak, the welfare of us to the degree that we are well off all comes today from the dams that we have got. If you are going to accept the climate change specialists, then those storms, those rains could be less.

It is my opinion that all of the rain water tanks, all of the reverse osmosis, which I would prefer to refer to than desalinisation because it is not only salt that you take out of the water—I learnt this in London. Thames Water chose not to put in a desalinisation plant. They are doing it in other ways, definitely with dams and ponds. That is the way they are going. I think that is in answer to the Reverend Nile's probe of how government can assist. I know the present Government in New South Wales has not got a policy on building dams or making present dams larger. I can take one accolade and give it to Lin Gordon when he was Minister. In Burrinjuck, our main supplier of water, Lin Gordon took the task to look into the bottom of Burrinjuck and he found that things were not all that good in the concrete wall. So Lin Gordon was responsible for doing lots of running repairs on Burrinjuck. If you look around you will find plenty of areas. It was done in 1975 by the late Jack Beale when he was Minister for Agriculture, and that is in the bowels of Macquarie Street. There are plenty of places around New South Wales, which we are talking about, where further catchments are available and dams could be built.

I have always advocated that those dams had to be interlocked. In other words, it should be a similar system to the Snowy Hydro system, and that can be done on the sandstone curtain the length and breadth of New South Wales. It has not been done because we have not been short of water. Now we are. I repeat: If the climate technology people are right, we will desperately need it in the future if we are to grow this country and the population. Any other questions?

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** What is the feeling around Leeton at the moment? You predicted disaster. What if there is no allocation over the next 12 months?

**Mr FULTON:** I submit some newspaper articles that answer the question in part. The club scene has already been covered. I have information that a receiver has been appointed by the lessees of the Historic Hydro Motor Inn. I think it is still owned by young fellow and his wife who live in Newcastle. They came down to put it to rights as a motor inn.

Of course, commercial confidence is mandatory and most desirable. However, it is fair for me to say that the water issue is affected by a favourite unpopular move by the State Government to divorce the water from the land. As a registered valuer I have certain in-depth thoughts and have had for a decade or two about that. Needless to say, we now have an artificial market for water. In two recent valuations I referred to the fact that water had been selling for \$2,400 to \$2,500 a megalitre for 65 per cent allocation high security water. I was wrong. I was told two days later that it had gone to \$2,800 a megalitre.

I asked my valuer peers in Griffith and elsewhere what would be the price if the dams were to spill tonight. Not one has answered me. Only one stock and station agent said that he did not know, but he did know that if the dams spilled tonight people would still want to buy water. Therefore, we have a base there and from the divorcing of land from water, from the 1985 temporary transfer to the permanent transfer that happened only in 1990-91, we are still in our infancy in finding the level and value of irrigation water.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Are you proposing to reverse that separation of water from the land? Is that feasible or is it past the point of no return?

**Mr FULTON:** I agree with the latter comment. I can only quote facts. The Chairman knows about the situation in Hay. The locals said that they could not do it; it was impossible. They have their reasons and as a valuer I have mine about why they may or may not be able to do it. But they are still charging rates this coming rate year based on the old valuations. The State Government has allowed them to do that because there are too many anomalies to do with some of the water on large grazing properties.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Is Hay the only place where an exemption has been granted? That means we have a twofold system in New South Wales.

**Mr FULTON:** As far as I know, the first four local government areas given the job under the new legislation relating to the separation of land and water were two down south—Murray and Wacool—and the Narrandera and Leeton Shire Councils. Because I had been put off council only two or three years before, I was vitally interested. However, of course, being mostly irrigated area—both horticultural and large area rice farms, as we refer to them—the effect of the separation of land from water on us was not as dramatic as the effect on Hay. Griffith is leading up to it this year. It will have its headaches this year as a city council. Narrandera was not bothered as much because it had river pumpers only who were affected by the separation of the land from the water. It depends on the makeup of the rateable base.

Getting back to the other statement, I am quite sure that the bull has been in the paddock and it is too late. To answer the question further, like most of our legislation and all of our processes in Australia, there could be some refinements. However, I am not clever enough to suggest them here and now.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** You mentioned a dam. I do not see where you could have a dam in this region. It is flat land. Where would it be located?

**Mr FULTON:** One of the things we would press for more than ever—John Chant will probably agree—is that it takes on average eight or nine days to get water from Burrinjuck, and to a degree Blowering, down the Murrumbidgee to the people who want it. If the weather changes dramatically during that time, that can be disastrous for people depending on wetting ground for trees, vines, cereal crops or pasture.

We have been looking at online storage. In other words, we may get heavy rain at the back of Tarcutta, which has a notorious creek that can flood overnight, even in an hour or two. That water flushes down. John Chant referred to this as off-allocation

water and the surge going down the river. If we had online storage—and there are probably two or three suitable sites above Narrandera—that water could be sitting there to be tipped onto the irrigation area as it is ordered and as needed, and electronically controlled from Sydney.

**CHAIR:** If you Mr Fulton or Mr Chant have anything further to add, you might like to put it in a submission to the Committee before 28 September.

**(Mr Fulton withdrew)**

**(The public forum concluded at 5.51 p.m.)**