

INDEX

PAGE

1.0	Background
2.0	Inland Diversion
3.0	Supplementary Storage
4.0	Aquifers
5.0	National Water Resources
6.0	Conclusion

1.0 BACKGROUND

The Local Government Border Rivers Project Group (the Group) covers areas or parts thereof, of Local Governments in Queensland and New South Wales which border on the Queensland-New South Wales State boundary between Longitude 144° and 152° and whose rivers flow into or are tributaries of the Darling River System.

Membership of the Local Government Border Rivers Project is open to Local Governments and Electricity Boards in this area and these are:

- Goondiwindi Town Council, Queensland
- Shire of Balonne, Queensland
- Shire of Bourke, New south Wales
- Shire of Brewarrina, New South Wales
- Shire of Inglewood, Queensland
- Shire of Inverell, New South Wales
- Shire of Severn, New South Wales
- Glen Innes Municipal, New South Wales
- Shire of Moree Plains, New South Wales
- Shire of Paroo, Queensland,
- Shire of Stanthorpe, Queensland,
- Shire of Tenterfield, New South Wales
- Shire of Waggamba, Queensland,
- Shire of Walgett, New South Wales
- Shire of Yallaroi, New South Wales,
- Far North Western Slopes County Council, New South Wales,
- Western Lands Commission, New South Wales

The object of the Group is the conservation of water by the erection of dams or any other means of water conservation in this area of the Darling River and its tributaries, and to consider the benefits of implementing small scale hydroelectric generation where appropriate and economically feasible on existing or new developments.

The Group also proposes to actively pursue the retention of water licences being linked to Land Titles and that because of the social, economic and environmental importance of water to the whole community, vigorously supports that ownership of water being vested in public ownership through elected government.

The Group feels a need to make a submission to this inquiry to oppose most forcibly, the poorly constructed, ill devised legislation coming down from the State Government of New South Wales.

This legislation which includes the Regulated, Unregulated and Groundwater Water Sharing Plans for all of New South Wales river valleys is based predominantly on incorrect information provided to these Water Committees by environmentalists resulting in huge amounts of water being taken for the environment by the use of the over precautionary principle.

This has been done with total disregard to the welfare and wellbeing of primary producers and without any consideration given to the resulting socio-economic effects on the local communities.

Lack of water equals loss of jobs plus loss of production, loss of services and declining population

The Group fully endorses Mr Ernie Bridge OAM, President of Watering Australia Foundation specifically the Clarence River proposal referred to in the Coffey Report. The Watering Australia Foundation is a non-profit organisation whose vision is "An Australia where cities and inland communities have secure, diverse and flourishing economies because water is no longer a limiting factor to the development of local natural resources and the talents of the people who live in them".

2.0 INLAND DIVERSION

2.1 *Clarence River*

A study into the inland diversion of the Clarence River has already been carried out. (Refer to Coffey Report)

3.0 SUPPLEMENTARY STORAGE

The Group believes that there is a good case that can be put for the building of low environmental impact water storage dams on nearly all valleys in New South Wales to supply water to the environment.

These storages could be built to supply the water that the environmentalists believe is needed to supply the environmental needs of the valley. For example in the Gwydir Catchment the environment receives the first 500 megalitres of flow below Copeton Dam in that valley plus up to 67500 megalitres stored in Copeton Dam has an environmental contingency allowance.

So in the Gwydir Catchment environmental water storage would be built on say the Horton River and it would only need to be about 150000 megalitre capacity, which could certainly be designed to be low environmental impact.

If these water storages were built in every valley in New South Wales, it would have the effect of giving back to the Irrigators the water the environmentalists have taken away from them.

4.0 AQUIFERS

Groundwater in New South Wales is obtained from a variety of aquifer systems and its uses are many and varied. Aquifers are an important resource that supports agricultural and grazing development over much of rural New South Wales.

Concern has increased about the declining condition of the State's water resources and increased pressures for groundwater use have resulted in the over-exploitation of some aquifers which have affected long term supplies.

It is vital that a comprehensive and integrated approach to the management of the State's groundwater resources is required if the quality and supply of groundwater is to be maintained in the longer term.

5.0 NATIONAL WATER RESOURCES

Across Australia, not just the area covered by the Group, there are rural communities and industries with existing and over-stretched water supply systems. It is a fact that in recent times there has been a disproportionately low share of funding apportioned by Governments to the maintenance of these systems and for the provision of new schemes.

It is estimated that more than 75% of our National water resources lie above the 26th parallel. But they are currently out of reach for want of a co-ordinated system for harvesting those resources and putting them to work for the National good.

These idle resources have the potential to create new primary and secondary industries, irrigation of hundreds of thousands of hectares of fertile agricultural land, which would all have the flow on effect for tourism, production and employment.

Without water being managed efficiently and effectively, Australia will be denied what the country is really capable of delivering and the need for strong government involvement is paramount in the development of our National water resources.

By concentrating on the big picture, the Commonwealth Government needs to focus on inland diversion and supplementary storages, solve the problems and plan for a good long term solution.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Rural industries and communities generate production of almost \$30 billion a year. Sales turnover and food processing is valued at \$55 billion a year. The entire sector employs more than 470,000 Australians.

Loss of this production, jobs, services to these communities are all jeopardised if water is not managed effectively and efficiently.

Legislation based on incorrect information has resulted in serious impacts on Councils and this incorrect information affects the socio-economics and the ability of the region particularly in relation to the lack of water, loss of jobs, loss of production, loss of services and declining population.

The Group fully endorses Mr Ernie Bridge OAM, President of Watering Australia Foundation in its vision "for cities and inland communities to have secure, diverse and flourishing economies because water is no longer a limiting factor to the development of local natural resources and the talents of the people who live in them".

The Group is totally committed to ensuring the provision of future water supplies for Australia's rural industries and communities.

Prepared by: Local Government Border Rivers Project Group
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