
SUSTAINABLE WATER STRATEGY
NORTHERN REGION DISCUSSION PAPER
MANAGING WATER SCARCITY
THE NEXT 50 YEARS



Psyche Pumps. Mildura Photo Mary J. Chandler

Submission by: Mary J. Chandler

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

I am a local writer/historian and conservationist and over the years have been involved with the following groups:

Member of the Hattah/Kulkyne National Park Advisory Group; Secretary, Sunraysia Field Naturalists' Club; President Fellowship of Australian Writers' Sunraysia Branch; Secretary Red Cliffs and District Historical Society; Junior Vice-President, Mildura Historical Society; Secretary, Red Cliffs Players; Publicity Officer, Red Cliffs Folk Festival; Committee Member Mildura Wentworth Arts Festival; Committee Member Mildura Wentworth Writers' Festival;
Current: Publicity Officer, Red Cliffs Historical Steam Railway and Cardross Progress Association Inc.

Background

My name is Mary Chandler. I was born at Mildura and have lived in the Sunraysia District all my life with the exception of several years away at boarding school and Melbourne University.

I am a local writer, historian and conservationist with a great interest in the environment, particularly, in this case, relating to water usage and sustainability..

My father, the late Les Chandler, a well-known writer, photographer, ornithologist and naturalist, both in Australia and overseas, was an original soldier settler in the Red Cliffs Soldier Settlement, which was formed after World War 1.

He first visited the Mallee in 1912 to study its fauna and flora, again in 1919 after he had returned from the War and in 1921 he came to Red Cliffs to take up land and set up a vineyard (known locally as a “block.”).

I grew up on a “block” and fully appreciate the difficulties faced by the growers today. We have always had a very low rainfall with an average around nine to ten inches, so that water for irrigation from the Murray River has been the only means of keeping this district viable. It is from this aspect, plus my great interest in the environment and the need to nurture what is left of our Murray Darling Basin that has prompted me to send in this submission.

Whilst I applaud the decision to bring out a discussion paper covering the managing of water scarcity for the next 50 years, there appears to be a number of flaws in the Discussion paper, which I hope to highlight in this Submission.

Yours sincerely

MARY J. CHANDLER

Water – a never-ending source

It never ceases to amaze me, that the majority of Australians and most overseas people seem to view Australia as a vast, empty country that needs to be populated. They completely overlook the fact that with the exception of northern Australia and along the coastal fringe of eastern Australia, the rest of Australia is a harsh environment that refuses to be harnessed to accommodate an out of fashion and exploding population and a climate that is forever alternating between droughts and floods.

Only six per cent of its vast land mass has proved to be arable, and Australia is definitely intensely affected by el nino years which bring savage droughts. We have been under an el nino in northern Victoria now for 12 or more years.

Headlines have appeared in our local newspaper, "Sunraysia Daily" Tuesday March 4, 2008
"ENTERING THE UNKNOWN", Relentless drought is taking us to where we haven't been before.

"The Southern Murray-Darling appears to have entered uncharted climatic waters, leaving climatologists and water managers unable to reply on historic records as a guide to future river flows and storage levels.

Dr. Wendy Craik, chief executive of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, told a national press briefing yesterday inflows into the southern basin were at the lowest levels since records began 116 years ago.

“I have to say we may well be in a different climatic arena to the one we’ve known in the past,” Dr. Craik said.” (See attachment V11 for the rest of the article).

Our greatest river, the Murray sometimes fails to reach the coast, and it carries less water in a year than the Mississippi in a day.

And it is the Murray and its tributaries that this Discussion paper is looking at with what I would term “grasping” eyes. The water is just not there.

One thing Australia and Victoria had and still have, is a treasure house of biodiversity, which has been trashed and abused over the years, and which is still being trashed and abused today. Its regions vary from the tropics, subtropics and temperate deserts, sclerophyll forests and grasslands to the high mountain snowfields.

Victoria also has its snowfields, its river plains, its Mediterranean areas, its grasslands, its forests and its seascapes.

And in Victoria, rural areas have always relied on the supply of water. In metropolitan Melbourne, Melbourne Water’s tentacles are creeping further away from the city towards rural Victoria to replenish an every-increasing need for more water.

Issues I wish to bring up are as follows:

1. The Sugarloaf Pipeline Project
2. Population Growth
3. Economic Growth
4. Water over allocation
5. Water sales, trading and unbundling
6. Impact on Biodiversity
7. Environmental Water

1, The Sugarloaf Pipeline Project

I find the Sugarloaf Pipeline Project totally inappropriate. The two pages allocated to this project show the lack of understanding and empathy the Government has with water issues that concern north of the divide.

The fact that it is proposed to interfere with the Barmah Choke and it is considered that there will be no adverse impact on the important Barmah wetlands defies all reason.

This is an attempt by Melbourne Water to steal water from both the Goulburn and Murray Rivers, water that is important to their survival and health.

Water is already being taken from the Goulburn to supply Bendigo, Ballarat and associated towns and now it will include Melbourne and Geelong as well. Just how far is the Eildon dam expected to stretch. Water is the life-blood of the parched north and it should not be taken south of the Dividing Range. In

fact, if anything, water should be brought from the south to the north.

Prior to the last election, Premier Brachs promised that no water would be taken from northern rivers for Melbourne's Water supplies. The Government has broken its election promise.

There are six Icon sites that come under the 'Living Murray' Project. The Living Murray's first step focuses on improving the environment at six 'Icon Sites' along the River.

The Living Murray Icon Sites were chosen for their high ecological value – most are listed as internationally significant wetlands under the [Ramsar convention](#) – and also their cultural significance to Indigenous people and the broader community. They are Barmah-Millewa Forest; Gunbower-Koondrook Perricoota Forest; Hattah Lakes Ramsar Wetlands; Chowilla Floodplain and Lindsay and Wallpolla Islands; Lower Lakes Coorong and Murray Mouth and the River Murray Channel.

Through The Living Murray, action is underway to provide water to these sites and support a natural environment unique to the Australian landscape.

Ecological objectives have been developed aimed at retaining, restoring or improving the sites' ecosystems, habitats, and species of flora and fauna.

It is vital that environmental water is available for these Icon sites as well as other important areas along the Murray.

In the Summary on page 85 it states:

“Interconnecting supply systems provides greater flexibility to ensure water can be supplied where and when it is needed, and to ensure that water can move from low to high value issues. There are many options at a local and regional scale to further develop Victoria’s Water Grid. These proposals should consider any impacts on other water users and the environment.”

I refer to the adverse impacts that have been ignored along the length of the Murray River down to the Murray mouth in South Australia.

Irrigation districts including Nyah, Swan Hall, Robinvale, Sunraysia, Renmark, Berri, Barmera, right down to the mouth of the Murray have been on 0 allocation, which has risen slightly to just over 40% recently. However, this is of no value to growers who depend on permanent plantings for a livelihood. They have had to let the majority of their plantings die in order to let the rest survive. This year they have received little or no income from the remaining plantings and are facing 0 allocation once again from July 1. So what do they do? Do you really think they will be happy that some of this water will be diverted for Melbourne and Geelong residents? The rumblings are getting louder all the time, especially when their

counterparts on the New South Wales side of the border have quite high allocations. (See attached articles from local paper, Sunraysia Daily).

I am attaching my submission on the Sugarloaf Pipeline Project to cover all my comments on this issue as I have no time to rewrite it into this submission.

2 Population Growth

When Australia was discovered by Captain Cook he remarked that on the coastal plain between botany Bay (Sydney) and the then impassable barrier of the Blue Mountains there was pasture for more sheep and cattle than could ever be brought here.

Captain Arthur Phillip, who was the first Governor of New South Wales described the new colony, in 1789 as: “here are few things more pleasing than the contemplation of order and using arrangement arising gradually out of tumult and confusion; and perhaps this satisfaction cannot anywhere be more fully enjoyed than where settlement of civilised people is fixing itself upon a newly discovered or savage coast. The wild appearance of land entirely untouched by cultivation, the close and perplexed growing of trees....are the first objects that present themselves... But by degrees large spaces are opened, plans are formed, lines marked, and a prospect at least of future regularity is clearly discerned.” (From Article for *The Edinburgh Review*, no 128, February 2008, *The Ecology of Australia* by Mark O’Connor.”

The early years of the convict settlement struggled to survive, with its inhabitants almost starving to death whilst they waited for supply ships to arrive. When Wentworth and Baxland discovered a path through the Blue Mountains, they were quickly followed by settlers who discovered that all of the interior was not quite the promised land they had expected to find and settle.

The myth that Australia is a vast empty continent still seems to persist, even though most of the population today clings to the coastal rim of Australia.

Immigration has been pushed by successive Governments who push the old pioneering view that Australia is an empty country, and Labor Governments took up the banner of multiculturalism to help with its policy that increased multi-national immigration was the way to go. The Liberal Government continued on with immigration which it doubled during its term of office.

As recently as a few weeks ago, John Brumby proudly announced that Melbourne was growing at a rate of 63,000 per year and he was opening up new land for housing development to cope with this. It appears that Melbourne will shortly be larger than Sydney.

Something to be proud about – a population that is larger than Sydney's and therefore needs more land, more infrastructure, more water?

Why is there this belief about that bigger is always better?

With an ever-expanding population, where do we get water from and how do we produce enough food to keep the population alive?

We take it from the already stressed waters of the Murray Darling Basin and forget about rural towns and rural people.

If the health and the plight of the Murray keeps deteriorating as it has been doing over the past years, another Willandra Lakes system will occur. We will have a huge water system filled with drifting sand, dead trees and no water to leave for future generations.

People can no longer grow their own food in their back yards. Draconian water-restrictions state-wide have been blamed on an unprecedented drought and throughout the north of the state we have watched our gardens die and become a dust bowl. We do not experience showers such as Melbourne does, our weather reaches many degrees above Melbourne's temperature most months of the year and this is an area that will be deprived of some water so that Melbourne users have "a secure water supply."

Gardens and plants help to deal with greenhouse gas emissions, yet all over Australia they are being allowed to die.

There have even been calls made locally for civil disobedience against water restrictions. A local group has been formed and is demanding that local

government and the State Government listens to what it is saying.

Older people (of which I am one) are forced to go out in the dark twice a week on watering days between 6.00am and 8 a.m. and 8.00pm and 10.00pm. In my case, I have very little outside lighting, so I have to creep around with a torch and hope that I do not fall over the many obstacles in the garden whilst turning on manual drippers or hand watering.

Don't get me wrong, I am grateful that the little bit of garden that has survived (mostly roses) is still clinging to life. I have even lost geraniums. Over the years I have spent thousands on my garden, it was very beautiful and I occasionally opened it up for viewing, but not any more. Even the roses are curling up because of our harsh climate. I have an exceptionally sore shoulder and arm from bucketing over the last couple of months that we have been allowed to do so, and just hope I will not fall because I have osteoporosis and could do a lot of damage to myself.

This year in Sunraysia we have a snake problem. Two doors down a friend found one four foot brown snake in her garden and a week later, when the house was being cleaned, a copper-head was reclining gracefully underneath the cushions on her couch. Needless to say she was quite perturbed. Two doors down the other street (I live on a corner), another neighbour also had a snake in her garden, and last weekend one was taking a rest underneath one of the teller machines right in the centre of town. Obviously the snakes are

seeking water and a cool place to rest, but they are certainly well away from the vineyards and areas where they would normally camp.

So, every time we go out into the garden early in the morning or of an evening, we are terrified that we will accidentally tread on a snake.

Another hazard in the evening is the mosquito. Since watering has been allowed between 8pm and 10pm, several people, one a very good friend, have come down with Ross River Fever.

This is just not good enough. Water restrictions are policed strictly and the use of the fleet of vehicles run by Lower Murray Water are creating a Greenhouse Gas Emission problem. Elderly ladies who being watering half an hour earlier have been penalised – one 83year old received a warning letter and is quite beside herself.

I just wonder why the authorities cannot be more flexible. When restrictions came in early 2007, people over 70 were given an exemption to water between 8am and 10am and 5pm and 7pm. This is far more practical, and I fail to understand why it is not allowed this time around.

Water bodies and the State Government are causing unnecessary stress and in many cases serious illnesses in enforcing their draconian restrictions. As the population only uses 4% of water normally, I fail to see why such harsh restrictions are in place. We need the

green cover to help with greenhouse gas emissions and in the case of the north-west of the state, to prevent more frequent and very large and horrific dust storms. I would think in future years that Melbourne will be experiencing dust storms similar to the one that hit the city in the late 70's.

If Melbourne people are fed up, we are doubly so, particularly as family and friends are losing their livelihoods due to zero irrigation.

There has to be a cap put on population growth and also the expansion of Melbourne and other large cities such as Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and the Latrobe Valley because we cannot sustain a large population.

3. Economic Growth

Economic Growth goes along cap in hand with population growth.

Most money in Australia comes from the mining industries or real estate speculation. And real estate is certainly flourishing in the big cities. Many rural Australians are being forced to move to Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth, and state governments have this perception that huge populations mean economic growth. It couldn't be further from the truth, and soon we will have a large poor population living in unacceptable conditions and living on Government handouts as they have no work and no accommodation.

It is important that no more areas are allowed to open up for irrigation. The huge MIS areas that have opened up must stop – they just guzzle water up and do not care whether their projects are a success or not.

Rising fuel costs are another problem that our population is headed for. The more cars we have on the road, the greater the greenhouse gas emissions.

And as water is turned off from irrigation, areas such as Sunraysia which produces most of Victoria's fruit, wine and vegetables, Victoria will be unable to grow enough food to support future populations.

Unfortunately there are people who believe that markets will always find a cheaper means of supply or substitute from overseas. The food will no longer be local or subjected to strict controls, it could be dearer but those who can afford it will be right. If a substitute cannot be found then the 'scientists' can always find a way out. The future prospects for Victorians are not very bright. Our days of a "good life" a numbered I believe.

4. Water Over allocations

For some time now water have been seriously over allocated from our rivers. A cap was placed on water allocations in the 1990's, but this is not sufficient for today's needs.

Water must be equally available for the environment, irrigation needs and urban dwellers and water from

northern waters must not go south to large cities as it is already taken up in the north.

5. Water sales, trading and unbundling

The introduction of water sales has been the nemesis of the irrigation industry. Water should not have become a commodity on the open market, as it is necessary to human survival. It has allowed MIS schemes to flourish, schemes with unlimited money that can force the price of water up to prohibitive prices. Banks and it is reported, the Japanese, also tried to enter the water market to make a kill and this is the last thing that should be allowed to happen with water. **It is essential and not a commodity to be bought by the highest bidder.**

Local horticulturists who wanted to buy in more water to keep some of their permanent plantings alive, were forced to pay up to \$1500 a megalitre over and above what they have to pay for their water allocations, whether they receive them or not. This is just not on.

Unbundling is also one of the worst things to hit our irrigation district of Sunraysia. If people have been forced to sell off their water just to survive, when it comes to selling the land there is no market available. Whoever would buy land with no water right? So the property that they have relied on to bring in enough money when they want to retire is completely useless and they have absolutely nothing. As most vineyards are only a small acreage this land will collect weeds and produce dust and just remain as an empty shell. It

will not be able to be put to any other use whatsoever.
(See photos in Sugarloaf Pipeline Project submission)

The Government has much to answer for in its handling of water. It cannot just blame the drought. Over-allocations and mishandling of water bodies leaves a lot to be desired.

6. Impact on Biodiversity

Australia has always been a dry and to many eyes, an inhospitable and difficult country to populate. Its indigenous population certainly managed to have a slight adverse impact on Australia's biodiversity, but on the whole they treated the land and its waters with respect. European settlement on the other hand, has been a disaster and it would appear that over the last odd 200 years we have not learnt much from our mistakes.

I wonder if we have any more real understanding of the damage we have done and are doing today and below is a poem I wrote 20 years ago, which expresses some of my feelings.

Australia – 200 Years

What are two hundred years of nationhood
to aboriginal man's forty thousand. It began
in the Dreamtime – from the majestic silence
of antiquity, ancestral legends passed down
by the makers of songs and images, a set of rules

to be followed by the rhythm of succeeding
generations;
tribal laws with a wisdom that upheld courtesy
and a deep respect for the wise old men of the tribe;
great warriors who performed prodigious feats of
valour
yet held a delicate awareness of their land,
a dreamlike merging of spiritual and material world
unfathomable to the medley of European colonists.

A warrior, a darkly shining silhouette
standing motionless on a fissured crag
watched fascinated as the great white birds
sailed gracefully into Botany Bay;
folding their wings like a seagull, they came
to rest in the saffron glow of late afternoon.

A shuffling, ill-smelling crowd, disgorged
spasmodically into tiny row boats,
scattered on the yellow sand, focusing blindly
on alien terrain with soporific indifference;
white naked faces, pale evil eyes, grossly inferior
beings
to the men in bright scarlet regalia
who herded these menial creatures with authority,
all intruders, superfluous in this ancient land.

Soft lights trembling across black water,
a tumultuous outbreak of savage quarreling
in an orgy of emotional release reached a puzzled host,
who, by an age-old law of courtesy
had reluctantly relinquished the foreshore;

withdrawn silently after angry counsel and watched anxiously,
dimly aware of a hidden menace to peace.
They clung to the land, these pale, strange beings
with surprising tenacity; asserting their power
with hostile magic – long sticks that spat fire.

More great white birds of exquisite beauty
arrived, this time with people who carried
themselves with authority, well set-up, determined,
ignorant of customs, their eyes lit with patronage
and contempt, they thrust further into tribal lands.
The great Earth Mother watched sadly as her wayward
offspring
spilled over the mountains to the plains beyond,
raping the forests of her ancient land
sweeping all before them in wanton destruction,
more catastrophic than any natural disaster.
Two hundred years of nationhood!

© Mary J. Chandler
February 1988

The health of the Goulburn and Murray Rivers should
be the Government's first priority, not pandering to
Melbourne's water needs which can be fixed by other
means.

Over the years we have impacted the biodiversity of
the Murray-Darling Basin and the building of the

north-south pipeline will have an even further adverse impact on our rivers, their wetlands and heritage sites.

Whilst economic growth and population growth drive rising greenhouse gas emissions and neither is up for discussion or negotiation the environment and its species will continue to suffer and disappear. As long as we stick with an economic system that needs to perpetually grow we will remain trapped on the road to ecological and climate disaster. What a future for our children!

The State Government appears that it can't work out its sums. Until it realises how serious our water situation is and cheap, band-aid methods only worsen the situation, nothing will change.

7. Environmental water

The Brumby Government is shutting environmental water flows off from Victorian Rivers. It has already shut off the Yarra River and it does not appear to have as yet sent the environmental waters to the Murray river agreed to under the "Living Murray" project.

When the VEAC Draft Report came down last year, Premier Brumby stated definitely that there amount of water suggestion therein for the environment would not be available. This is an outrage.

If the Pipeline is built the first 75GL will go to Melbourne and there is no guarantee that any year the irrigations and the environment will receive their share.

It would appear that the advent of floods may occur less frequently, in fact it could be many years before we see another flood occur along the Murray and its tributaries.

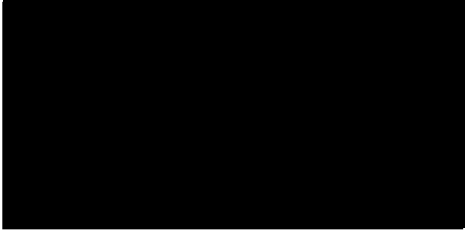
Floods are needed for the health of the rivers so we must supply environmental water in their stead.

The Water Grid should not be expanded enabling water to be traded more readily by making it easier to transfer water to where it is most needed and value. That of course is Melbourne and the larger cities.

It is already over allocated water use from all its rivers. This cannot continue, particularly in drought years. How can water be purchased from Sunraysia for use downstream, when in actual fact there is insufficient water in the river to use it? It is all so illogical. Rural citizens are part of Victoria too, though one wonders if the Government realises that.

As with the Sugarloaf Pipeline Project submission, I feel that I have wasted my time writing this submission also. It is necessary that rural people's thoughts with regard to these issues are known, but it is very annoying and disheartening to know that our opinions don't count. DSE and the Government will plough ahead with what they want to do regardless.

Mary J. Chandler



March 17, 2008

**Department of Sustainability and Environment,
Attention ; Sustainable Waters Strategies Branch, Water Office,
Po Box 500,
East Melbourne 3002**

Dear Sir,

Re: Sustainable Water Strategy Northern Region Discussion Paper
Managing Water Security
The next 50 years

I am attaching the following:

1. Submission for the Sustainable Water Strategy, Northern Region Discussion Paper, Managing Water Security, The next 50 years
2. Attachments as follows:

ATTACHMENTS

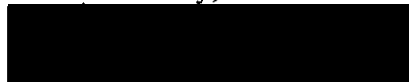
- No 1 Goulburn-Murray Water Releases 2008/9 Seasonal Allocation Outlook
- No 2 Murray Darling Basin Commission Report for the Week ending Wednesday, 20 February, 2008
- No 3. Sunraysia Daily article "It's Theft dated 21/9/08
- No 4 Sunraysia Daily article Change the Rules, dated Tuesday February 26, 2008
- No 5 Sunraysia Daily article Water: Time to get tough dated Friday 22,2208
- No 6. Sunraysia Daily article Water buyback just the start? Dated Thursday 28, 2008
- No 7. Sunraysia Daily article Just a sip, dated Tuesday March 4, 2008 and "Entering into the Unknown"
- No 8 Sunraysia Daily article Our Shrinking Land, The 'dead spots' are dated Saturday March 8, 2008
- No 9 Susmission, Sugarloaf Pipeline Strategy

Mails from this area are totally unreliable and sometimes take up to a week to get to the recipient and I do not wish this Submission to be ignored because of its late

arrival, so I have spoken with an officer in Ballarat explaining that. I have already emailed the submission only and am now registering a Hard Copy of Submission plus all attachments.

Many thanks.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.

Mary J Chandler