

Submission Sustainable Water Strategy Northern Region

Your report clearly indicates that climate change will to have a significant effect on the people and the environment. Even the mildest change will have an impact. The environment is adaptive given sufficient time, and has coped with change over millions of years, however, mankind's over allocation of the scarce water resource and the acceleration of the climate changes is now dealing the environment a massive blow.

Here are my comments, in no particular order:

- Your estimates of population growth of 170,000 over nearly 50 years seem insufficient. (page 3). The growth rate of 0.6% may need to be reviewed with some modelling on different scenarios. The growth of Melbourne will cease by 2055 due to resource constraints. The population growth will spill over to the North as is already occurring.
- The concept of a water grid is incorrect. A true grid moves resources both ways. Water should flow from an area of plenty to an area of shortage. It is apparent that the grids being proposed here, are being built one way only, and so only do ½ the job to “maximise flexibility for water sharing” (page12). There is no time or resources to be wasted on half measures.
- The North South pipeline is the most serious threat to water security in the Northern region. If the pipeline is built, there will no longer be a stand alone Northern Water Region. The discussion paper must be extended to what the needs of the South will be and what impact this will have on the Northern river systems.
- The Premier's determination to build this pipeline at any cost will result in a doubling of the urban demand of water upon the Northern Rivers. The entire water usage of the North East, Goulburn Valley, Coliban, and Central Highlands, 160 towns including Wangaratta, Benalla, Wodonga, Shepparton, Seymour, Bendigo, Echuca, Castlemaine and Maryborough, is less than the water transferred out of the Northern region by the North South pipeline. (Refer table 2.4.) I fail to see how any serious discussion paper can ignore this point. Just because a decision is Government Policy doesn't mean it is good and beyond rigorous debate. Please devote a chapter to what the

North South pipeline, the sharing of irrigation upgrade water savings and Melbourne's population growth truly means for Northern Rivers.

- 75G of water going to Melbourne is used once and then dumped at sea. In Northern Victoria the used water is either applied to a secondary purpose or released into waterways to form part of the flow until it is harvested again for reuse by the next town downstream. It may be used again and again. Taking water out of the most efficient reuse system to the least efficient is just stupid. The Government should be looking for strategies to promote regional growth rather than wasting money shifting water resources to Melbourne.
- The Foodbowl modernisation project captures the easiest water savings. This discussion paper suggests that there are more water savings to be gained, however it incorrectly assumes that these savings will be retained in the Northern River Systems. The correct assumption would be to assume that the precedent is set for a 1/3 of all future savings to be available for Melbourne water, as per the arrangements for the North South pipeline. To ignore this fact is to overstate future water availability. (Page 72).
- The figures quoted for potential water savings from irrigation upgrades overlook the fact that much of the irrigation water is carried by a living river system; these are not channels that could be piped or lined with plastic. This assumption overestimates the water that can be saved by irrigation upgrades.
- The discussion paper is brief in its consideration of the Federal Government's \$10 billion Murray Darling plan, in particular page 73 discussion in relation to on-farm efficiency. I think this issue needs further in-depth consideration as a future option.
- I would like to see some calculations as to what water savings from irrigation upgrades will be available under the various climate change scenarios. All the figures I see, the 800-900 GL are based on historic data, this report is looking forward, we should have access to this information. (Page 71). Please provide this information.

- I am concerned about the allocation of water to the highest value end use. (page 26) We need a mix of annual irrigation enterprises i.e. pasture, rice etc and perennial enterprises orchards and viticulture etc. It seems to me if everyone went for the perennial options then in times of severe drought a lot of ventures will be destroyed. What has saved many enterprises this year is that for example dairy farmers have transferred their entitlement, and used fodder etc. allowing the perennial users to have access to water. If we continue with the market theory only supporting the highest value usage then this may not be the case in the future. Maybe some regulation or planning is required in order that like ventures are located in close proximity and restricted in total area?
- With grain prices at all time highs and bio fuels using large volumes of grain, and with climate change predicted to make many traditional cropping areas unviable, will it be that irrigation areas will be growing grain? Will the water shortage in the future be that severe that the irrigation season shifts to winter, providing timely, efficient watering of winter crops?
- Other initiatives (page 79). If the North South pipeline goes ahead, then I think Melbourne water consumers should be offered the choice of where they source their water. A scheme similar to the Red Energy for electricity. They could nominate traditional dam water, desalination water, recycled water, reclaimed storm water and North South pipeline water. In the case of the North South pipeline water, if Melbourne consumers did not choose to use the full allocation (due to concerns for the Northern Rivers and Green house gases) then the yearly unused amounts could be unused for environmental flows.
- Urban water restrictions for Melbourne and Regional areas should not be seen as temporary. Never return to our water wasting ways. Regulations should be made to specifically outlaw water wastage.
- Urban water pricing strategies need to be modernised to reflect a true user pays approach including the carbon cost. A safety net needs to be in place for the less well off (similar to electricity supply).
- Page 79 Managing unregulated streams. Winter fill dams must be introduced, with a mandatory percentage of the irrigator's water being

sourced this way. 'Private' and 'stock and domestic' users need to be metered, and charged accordingly. Options, rather than pumping from the waterways, should be financial supported, such as tanks and natural fill dams. Tank Grants, like urban users, should be available throughout all of the state, i.e. including regional and rural areas.

- Grants for off waterway dams, and if necessary winter fill dams, should be available for stock watering points on the condition that stock are denied access to the waterway at all times.

- Local Government planning schemes must ensure that all subdivision lots have sufficient water harvesting area based on at the least the medium climate change scenario. Future pumping direct from waterways should be prohibited with the exception of winter fill dams. Where ground water is available it should be metered and restricted to two megs.

Regards

Alan Cassell

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