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25 October 2101

Mr. T. Windsor MP,

Dear Sir,

RE: Water for the Murray Darling River System.

I note your interest in the Murray Darling River system, and your interest in the possibility of sourcing water for this system from North Queensland rivers.

The idea of damming the Burdekin and using its flood waters to augment the flow of rivers flowing west from the Great Dividing Range had its origin in the latter part of the 19th C.

Soon after cattle had been de-pastured on the Channel Country of the Cooper and Diamantina it was realised that when these rivers flooded, this resulted in the entire Channel Country “cracky ground” and claypans being naturally flood irrigated. It was also noticed that whereas the Burdekin runs a heavy flood almost every wet season, the Channel Country can experience concomitant many year long periods of severe drought. In late 1956/early 1957 I was on two trips droving cattle from the Carnarvons to Bourke. The first was in a drought. We had goanna for Christmas dinner. The second we were caught by a rain depression on the Maranoa and Condamine which saw mobs of a thousand head each camped on the stockroute all the way from St George to Bollon because we couldn’t cross the flood in the Balonne. Later that year I spent the year as a fencing contractor on Tanbar Station in the Coopers Creek Channel Country which was in the grip of a terrible drought. 7 points of rain fell on Tanbar that year. With a good flood of the Channel Country Mt. Howitt Station turned off 25,000 fats in one year. (I think it was 1953.) In a drought virtually no cattle leave the Cooper.

The unique suitability of the Channel Country for fattening cattle depends on the facts that the Channel Country is desert country and so is virtually pathogen free and its flood irrigation is usually occasioned by rainfall months earlier on distant head waters.

My father was born in 1891 and saw as a child the devastation wrought by the legendary floods and droughts of that decade on the people of the Queensland bush.

In the 1920s my father was appointed head teacher of a unique school consisting of several railway carriages which was hauled by train from one siding to another throughout the bush districts of Queensland which were without schools. He had his motorbike on the school-train and spent every weekend for years surveying the rivers which could form part of what he called “the Western Waters Scheme”. He spent the rest

of his 99 year life importuning State and Federal politicians from Queensland to South Australia trying to have the scheme implemented.

As part of this campaign he took all the results of his surveying to Dr. Bradfield and that is how “the Western Waters Scheme” got to be known as “The Bradfield Scheme”. However, Dr Bradfield was an engineer and fatally altered my father’s ideas of creating an annual flood irrigation of the Channel Country for cattle and sheep, to using the water for crop irrigation – a totally different concept.

Your idea of sourcing water for the Murray/Darling from North Queensland rivers sounds highly practicable to me. The Burdekin Falls Dam, which was part of the original Western Waters Scheme has of course been built. I’m no longer sure of details but I think diversion of the Tully and Herbert Rivers to the Burdekin was also part of the scheme. One of the options was piping the water through (over?) the Great Dividing Range to the headwaters of Tower Hill Creek which flows into the Thompson.

The Thompson and the Barcoo join at the upstream end of the Cooper Creek Channel Country upstream from Windorah. There is a left bank tributary of the Barcoo called Powell’s Creek from which to the Warrego via the Langlo would not seem to be an engineering impossibility. Perhaps the headwaters of the Bulloo River could be utilised.

There was enough water flowed over the Burdekin Falls dam on its way to wiping out the corals of the Great Barrier Reef with silt for hundreds of miles in the recent floods, to have filled Lake Yamma Yamma and Lake Eyre, run the Strzelecki, and provided water for the paddle wheel steamers on the Darling.

Your problems should be a rational engineering feasibility study coupled with a study of the effects on the river systems involved, including flood mitigation in North Queensland, decreased siltation of the Great Barrier Reef, hydroelectricity production, threat of salination, and the economics of the scheme considering both livestock production in the Channel Country, and maintained or increased primary production from the Murray/Darling, as well as maintenance of the wetlands in New South Wales and South Australia. Instead I fear that your opponents will be everyone from the vegetarian greenies of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart, to the land sharks and usurers of the real estate business – all of whom believe that food comes out of a shop.

So that you can take a guess at my competence to write on these matters, I have a BSc (Vet) Hons 1 Physiology from U of Q, and a PhD in Marine Biology from JCU from work on pearl oysters. I have at various times made a living as a stockman, drover and fencing contractor, been a partner in an 800 square mile cattle station south of Princess Charlotte Bay, been a tin miner and hospital biochemist and worked in universities in a Water Research Laboratory, and Pathology, Veterinary Pathology, Physiology, Physiological Chemistry and Marine Biology Departments.

I wish you well. I wish my father had lived long enough to see a Federal Labor Government supported by two non-Labor members from rural electorates as he believed

all his life that the Country Party and the ALP were natural political allies and that Australian politics was distorted by a coalition between the Liberals and the Country Party.

If it would be of interest or assistance to you, I know of several people who have copies of my father's original work,.

Yours faithfully,
(Dr.) BJA Vance.