

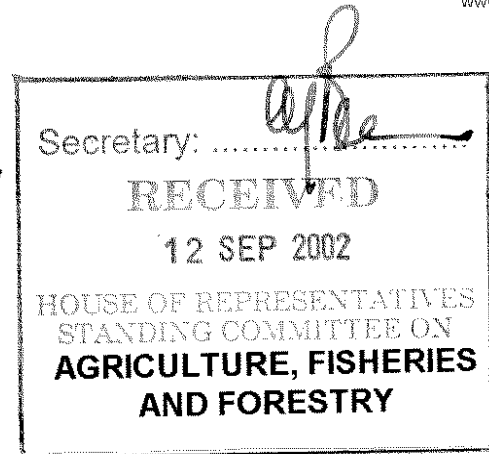


Ref: RM:jkk 520/02 (14.15)
Contact: Ross Manthorpe
Direct No: (08) 8224 2043
E-mail: Ross.Manthorpe@lga.sa.gov.au
Ausdoc: DX 546 Adelaide

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Mr Ian Dundas
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr Dundas

Inquiry into Future Water Supplies for Australia's Rural Industries and Communities

Thank you for the opportunity for the Local Government Association (LGA) to present a submission to the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry inquiry into future water supplies for Australia's rural industries and communities.

The LGA recognises water as a fundamental natural resource upon which environmental, social and economic sustainability and growth is totally dependent. Good quality water is undoubtedly the limiting factor of the threshold of economic growth and development in much of South Australia, especially in the rural sectors, which rely on rainfall, groundwater or piped river water to support communities and individuals. In some situations water is carted for domestic use.

Councils in South Australia are well aware of the condition of the water supply and the pressure that its reliable availability places on their rural communities.

The uncertainty and unpredictability of rainfall in much of the rural sector of South Australia creates similar uncertainty and unpredictability for both economic and social development.

Notwithstanding the variability of rainfall for crop and livestock purposes, it is imperative that there is certainty of reticulated potable supplies for all communities and established business and industry.

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Much of South Australia's reticulated water is supplemented from the River Murray. This includes Adelaide, which indicatively, on average, relies on the River Murray for 40% of its water supply (in dry years this can be closer to 100%). River Murray water is piped over a wide area of the State, including for example, Whyalla on the Eyre Peninsula and Keith in the Upper South East. Many other rural towns throughout the State rely on River Murray water, as do many commercial and primary production activities that can access pipeline network off-takes. For this reason it is imperative that the quality and quantity of water available from the River Murray is sustainably managed.

The LGA asserts that the Commonwealth Government has a significant role in ensuring adequate and sustainable supply of water in rural and regional Australia. A critical role is ensuring the improved quality and a sustainable supply of water from the River Murray, especially for the remote urban users to whom water is piped.

The LGA and Councils throughout the State are undertaking programs and activities aimed at improving their water quality and supply, including for example.

- The Murray and Mallee Regional Local Government Association is currently seeking to undertake a regional Plan Amendment Report to achieve consistent planning approaches by Councils within whose areas the River Murray Flows.
- The LGA is currently participating in the Water Conservation Partnership Project (a joint SA stakeholder project) aimed at reducing the dependency on River Murray water by River Murray urban users.
- The LGA is currently undertaking a review of Local Government's roles and responsibilities in regard to water quality and a training needs analysis for Local Government workers involved with water systems management.

Whilst the Commonwealth has determined catchment and salinity management plans for the Murray Darling Basin and is directing some funds from the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality towards this, there is a feeling that the quality and supply issues related to the River Murray need to be approached with much more focus and aggression. The South Australian Government is seeking to take a lead role in River Murray management through the development of the proposed River Murray Act. It is imperative that other States adopt roles that will support the future of the River Murray as a sustainable water source and that the Commonwealth provides support and adequate resources for this.

The LGA contends that all fresh water supplies in South Australia are under stress, this includes surface and ground water. There is evidence, for example, on the Eyre Peninsula, that surface water and ground water supplies are not capable of meeting current and projected water demands and that consequently the threshold of economic development and the growth of communities has been reached. Without additional or assured water supply many of South Australia's rural communities are restricted in their potential growth and development. This is certainly the case in terms of sustaining increased permanent and tourist populations and industries that rely on reticulated water. There is an expectation by visitors to all areas that the availability of potable water is a foregone conclusion. This is currently far from the case at many tourist destinations in rural South Australia, where there is significant potential for further growth in this industry.

If the Commonwealth Government aims to support and revive sustainable regional development then it is necessary to identify and address the importance of water supplies. Without a strong and vibrant rural and remote network of communities then many settled parts of Australia could become somewhat alienated. It is important to support and enhance the strength of existing remote and rural sectors as they play a vital but often unacknowledged role in contributing to the well-being of the nation.

Given the stress on existing rural and remote water resources in South Australia it is imperative that significant resources be put into developing new technologies, for example desalination of sea water on a significant scale and associated reticulation infrastructure and aquifer storage and recovery.

If you require further information or seek clarification on any matters please contact Mr Ross Manthorpe at the LGA whose contact details are above.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Clancey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian Clancey
Director, Legislation and Environment