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SUBMISSION TO
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE
ON AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCES
ON
THE INQUIRY INTO WATER USE EFFICIENCY IN AUSTRALIAN
AGRICULTURE

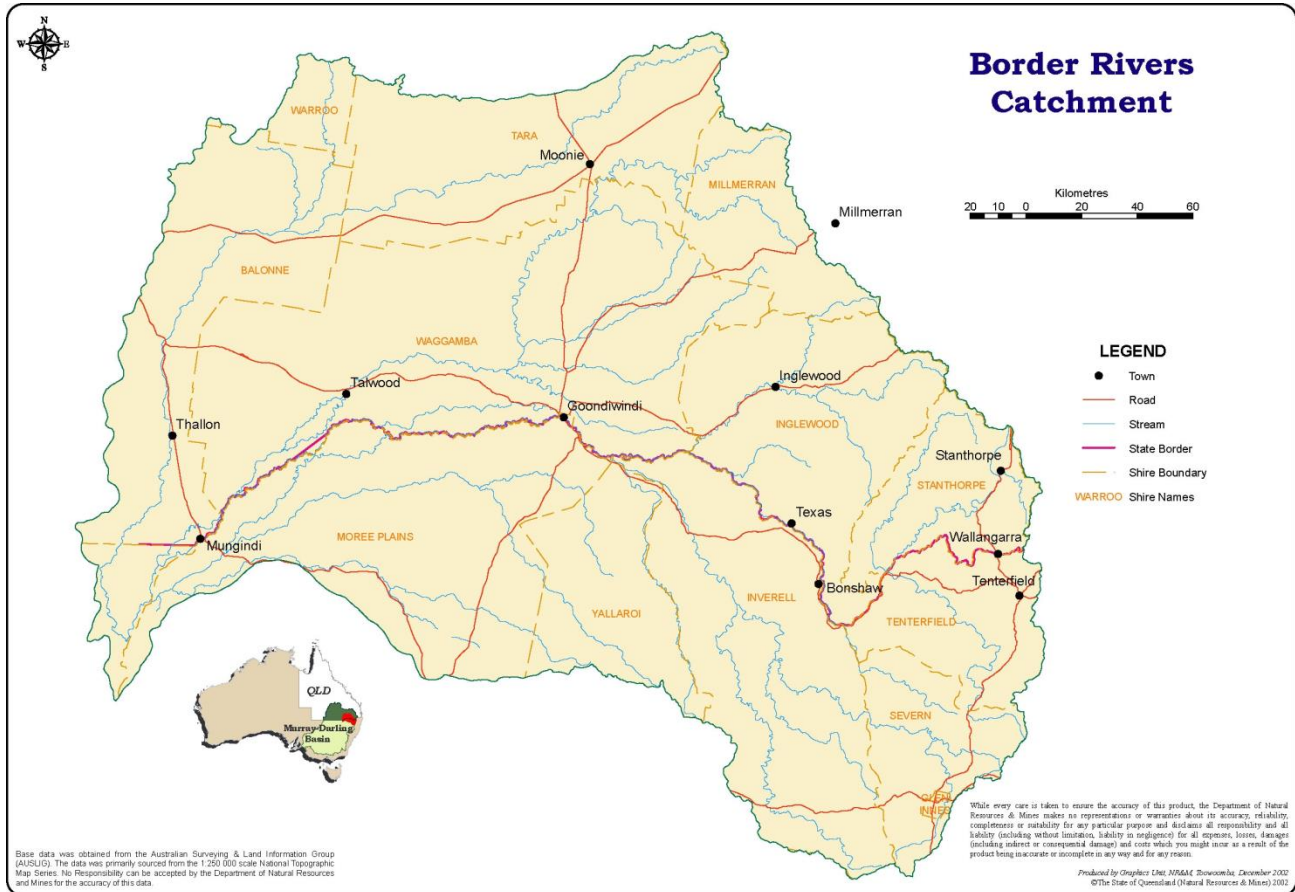
SUBMISSION DUE BY 5PM FRIDAY MARCH 31ST 2017

Prepared by
TIM NAPIER
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

AFFILIATES: BOOMI-GNOURA GNOURA WATER USERS ASSOCIATION; DUMARESQ VALLEY IRRIGATORS ASSOCIATION; EASTERN RECHARGE GROUNDWATER USERS ASSOCIATION; LOWER WEIR RIVER WATER USERS ASSOCIATION; MACINTYRE BROOK IRRIGATORS ASSOCIATION; MACINTYRE VALLEY COTTON GROWERS ASSOCIATION; MOLE & SOVEREIGN WATER USERS ASSOCIATION; MUNGINDI WATER USERS & COTTON GROWERS ASSOCIATION; PINDARI WATER USERS ASSOCIATION; UPPER WEIR RIVER & TRIBUTARIES WATER USERS ASSOCIATION

INTRODUCTION

Border Rivers Food and Fibre (BRFF) represents the water users and entitlement-holders of the Border Rivers region of southern Queensland and northern New South Wales. These water-users responsibly utilise the water resources of the Macintyre Brook, the Dumaresq, Macintyre, Severn, Weir and Barwon River systems and the Eastern Recharge Zone of the Great Artesian Basin. Production from irrigated agriculture includes vegetables, herbs, stone-fruit, hay, cereals, coarse grains and cotton. Its contribution to the local economy exceeds \$500 million (farm gate) in average years.



This document represents the views of the members of BRFF, though individuals are entitled to their own views relating to their own circumstances.

BRFF is also a member of the NSW Irrigators Council and National Irrigators Council. Whilst generally endorsing their views, we maintain the right to hold independent positions.

SUBMISSION

The development of irrigation in the late 20th Century in the north of NSW and southern QLD had a tremendously beneficial impact on the communities in the region and we would like to see that benefit preserved and built upon in the 21st century.

The face of agriculture has changed markedly in the last generation with the rise in irrigated agriculture coinciding with the decline of some traditional grazing industries, particularly wool, resulting in the move from the traditional grazing industries into broadacre cropping, both dryland and irrigated.

We see an opportunity for this transition to be built upon to cement in the gains that have occurred in regional communities as a result of the change and to build a sustainable future for our farmers, our towns and our regions.

Many regional towns, especially the smaller ones, feel they are under the constant threat of becoming collateral damage in a government reform process. They feel that both economic puritanism and city-based decision-making are a real and present threat to their continued existence. The well-intended, but poorly executed commonwealth and state water reforms have devastated some towns already and threaten to devastate more and we cannot afford a repeat of these reforms. As a result of these negative impacts on them, irrigators are very suspicious and cynical about Government programs of any description. Their intended benefits are often over-sold and then the programs are under-resourced and poorly delivered. Government programs are typically perceived as being too exclusive and difficult to participate in and many will just not bother to apply to any government program that doesn't appear as a compelling option in the first instance.

Our irrigators don't want subsidies or handouts, but we do want obstacles to our livelihoods and businesses removed.

WATER-USE EFFICIENCY

We acknowledge the recent efforts to examine the potential opportunities for improvements in the area of water storage, and on-farm water-use efficiency and congratulate those responsible for taking the time and making the effort to at least come to our region and speak to us about it. We don't expect miracles, but we do expect genuine effort to make changes to benefit not just irrigators, but to our regional communities.

Irrigators have taken responsibility for their own on-farm water-use efficiency, with most undertaking the investment to make improvements on their own. This has been highlighted by the low level of uptake of the Commonwealth programs to recover water under the Basin Plan, most of the work has already been done.

The biggest opportunity for improving water-use efficiency is the expansion of water storage. In the Border Rivers we have more water-storage capacity on-farm than we do in the headwaters. This has come about as a result of the legacy of state decisions made where it was determined that they not build large storages, but promote the building of a large number of small, on-farm storages.

It is clearly the role of government to build these structures for the benefit of the state and the nation, as the benefits flowing from these investments go more broadly than the immediate region. Our most recent structure, Pindari enlargement, was funded jointly by the NSW Government and water-users. As a result, we have paid for the building of the structure that would otherwise not have been built, due to government reluctance, but we have no ownership of it.

Irrigators would prefer to store their water in an upstream structure where it is more efficient to do so because of lower storage losses, such as evaporation, than when storing on-farm.

In the Border Rivers, the option of building the Mole River dam is being re-examined and we strongly support this investigation as a way of improving our water-security.

We will be happy to provide further detail in person at the hearing in Toowoomba.