

THE ONGOING SAGA OF THE WILCANNIA WEIR

Back as far as 1989/90, the then NSW State Water Minister, John Aquilena, was persuaded by our then Local Member Peter Black, to fund a new weir to shore up the Wilcannia water supply.

These funds were subsequently withdrawn because of lack of local compliance.

A further attempt was initiated in 2004. Quite a bit of ground work was completed then by Central Darling Shire, Western Catchment Management Authority and others. This project was blocked by a small, but vocal, group.

The current move to build a weir downstream from the town started in 2012, with an application from the local Tourism Association backed 100% by the Central Darling Shire to once again look into constructing a new weir downstream from the town to not only shore up our town supply but to assure the property owners downstream of stock and domestic water in no flow periods.

A petition of 500 signatures was then presented to State Parliament, a community site meeting was held, local agreement was met, and so State Government allocated \$89,000 for a feasibility study by Jacobs Consulting.

The results of this study were passed on to Department of Primary Industries, and subsequently went on to State Cabinet. The proposal has been sitting there for the past 18 months.

The cost of the proposed new weir here at Wilcannia appears to be in the range of \$11 to \$13 million dollars. This equates to about \$17,000- per head of local population, without taking into account the water security it will afford the graziers and hundreds of thousand head of stock downstream by withholding water and releasing it in a period of no flow.

Over the past 30 years the increased use of water in the upper Barwon-Darling system has left the lower system much dryer for longer periods. The increased use of water upstream has contributed significantly to the NSW economy and thus the State's coffers. Surely the State government can find a small proportion of that money to build a new weir here in Wilcannia in a far more logical location, down stream of the town. What do they expect the 550 residents of the town to do when the next water emergency approaches? Are we expected to move to Broken Hill to safety?

It is interesting to note that when Menindee Lakes were compromised to service Broken Hill with basic water, \$500 million was found by NSW Water in a period of 2 to 3 weeks to fund a pipeline from the Murray River. It took a matter of weeks to call for contracts etc. for the various stages. This figure equates to \$29,500- per head of Broken Hill population, and does not allow for ongoing costs of pumping and maintenance.

Then along came the "4 Corners Report".

On top of this, an email has just been received offering 500 million dollars, in the "Growing Local Communities Fund" for our region, which is part of the \$1.3 Billion Growth Fund announced by the NSW State Government in their 2017/18 budget.

All we need is \$13 million for our weir and \$40 million to seal the only State highway in NSW that's still a boggy mess after 20 mls. of rain.

This outback region transports out millions of dollars of produce every year, in the form of wool, live sheep, goats, and processed meat. Why does the government take no notice of our basic needs that the rest of the State takes for granted? We don't want special treatment, just treat us the same.

Bill Elliott, President, Wilcannia Community Tourism Association Inc.



