



Our Australian Rice Industry

Growing Rice to Feed the World

10 June, 2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment,
Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

Water (Crisis Powers and Floodwater Diversion) Bill 2010

The Ricegrowers' Association of Australia Inc. (RGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a short submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts inquiry into the Water (Crisis Powers and Floodwater Diversion) Bill 2010.

The RGA is the collective voice of rice growers in Australia. The RGA represents over 1500 voluntary members in NSW and Victoria on a wide range of issues. As much of the Riverina region has been built upon rice, and rice is still the mainstay of many towns today, it is important that RGA members have strong and effective representation. RGA fulfils this role by representing and leading growers on issues affecting the viability of their businesses and communities.

The rice industry encompasses the Murray Valley of NSW and Victoria and the Murrumbidgee Valley of NSW. Typically, around 150,000 – 160,000 hectares are sown to rice annually producing an average of around 1.2 million tonnes of rice. The industry has a farm gate value of around \$350 million and total value (export earnings, value-added) of over \$800 million, including flow-on effects. It is estimated that the industry generates over \$4 billion annually to regional communities and the Australian economy. Rice growers have individually invested over \$2.5 billion in land, water, plant and equipment and collectively invested around \$400 million in mill storage and infrastructure through the Ricegrowers' Cooperative Limited (SunRice) and the Rice Marketing Board of NSW (RMB).

The RGA has publicly opposed the concept of transferring control of the Murray-Darling Basin to the Commonwealth. We are therefore extremely concerned that this Bill attempts to remove power from the States and centralize it with the Commonwealth.

The current debate on the future of the Murray-Darling Basin is moving forward and a draft Basin Plan is expected to be released within weeks. The RGA, together with a large number of key stakeholders from across the Basin, are investing significant time and resources in that process through the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. The RGA therefore considers that this Bill is both ill considered and ill timed and the adoption of this Bill would remove elements of certainty for irrigated agriculture which we are looking to the Basin Plan to deliver.

Whilst we understand that this Bill is unlikely to attract support from either the Federal Government or the Federal Opposition, a Bill like this warrants a “no chances” approach.

The RGA is a member of the National Farmers’ Federation, National Irrigators’ Council and the New South Wales Irrigators’ Council and we have had input into separate submissions being prepared by each of these organisations. The RGA fully supports and endorses the views expressed in those submissions and requests that the Committee notes our support for their detailed submissions.

The RGA further requests that the Committee notes our concern that the adoption of this Bill has the potential to seriously undermine the efforts of the Commonwealth, the States, and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to move to a new era in resource planning and management for the Basin.

Yours faithfully
RUTH WADE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR