Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

Response to question taken on notice at a public hearing on 1 November 2017

Response received 5 January 2018

Proof Committee Hansard, p. 34:

Senator McALLISTER: I want to talk to you about a number of things, so I will try to move through them quite quickly. You identify three issues of concern in the changes to the Barwon-Darling water-sharing plan. Can you explain the issue of the removal of pump size limits. Quickly, what is the impact of the changes to pump size limits?

Mr Gall: Essentially the impact is, where once irrigators were only allowed to access water with a limited size of pump, if my understanding serves me correctly, there is no limit on the size of the pump that can be used to pump those low flows now.

Senator McALLISTER: Was that pump limit relevant only during times of low flows, or did it apply for access for all classes of water?

Mr Gall: No, I'm fairly sure it only applied to low-flow situations, but I'd have to take that as a question on notice and get further information if you would like me to.

Senator McALLISTER: Thanks, that would be great. What I am specifically trying to understand is what the original intention was of including a limit on the pump size and what the consequence is, therefore, of removing it in terms of the access of other participants in the river system and also impacts on the environment. If you could take that on notice and get back to us later, that would be great.

RESPONSE:

Mr Lachlan Gall, President, Pastoralists' Association of West Darling

The practical outcome of the changes implemented by the Barwon-Darling Water Sharing Plan is excessive extraction of water from the river, exacerbated by a provision in the Water Sharing Plan allowing extraction of 300% of entitlement, as described in the following example:

- Prior to the introduction of Cap in 2007, the maximum annual extractions by all A Class licence holders from the entire river system and over an entire water year was less than 5 GL. Virtually none of this water was pumped into any off river storage.
- Prior to 2012, [a Bourke company] held approximately 3 GL of A Class licence (of the total of less than 5 GL), used for direct pumping to perennial plantings in small daily extractions extended throughout the year.
- By 2015, this enterprise had changed hands, and the A Class licence volume increased through other acquisitions to 4 GL.
- Immediately prior to the cotton planting period in 2015 this new enterprise extracted 12 GL (using the 300% clause) at one pump site under A Class pumping

conditions and over a short duration of time. This water was pumped directly into an off river storage.

- By contrast, the cumulative total flows at Wilcannia for the 4 months from November 2015 to February 2016, being the period following the upstream extractions, was less than 8 GL.

(Continued below)

Comparison between licence classes on Barwon-Darling

	PRE-2012 BARWON-DARLING WSP	**POST-2012 BARWON-DARLING WSP**	**PRE AND POST 2012 B-D WSP**
LICENCE	A Class	A Class	B Class
INTENTS	Small scale irrigation to drought proof grazing properties. Small scale irrigation of permanent plantings eg citrus, grapes Extract from river direct to crops Small volumes throughout each year **These extractions were considered to have minimal impact on river flows due to small diameter pumps**	With removal of pump size limits, large pumps are now used by cotton growers extracting water to storages Extract from river direct to storage Extract significant volumes over short periods of low flow **These extractions now have significant impact on low flows over short periods of time**	Large scale irrigation for annual cropping, eg cotton Extract from river direct to storage Large volumes during periods of higher flow **These extractions were recognised to have significant impact on river flows due to large diameter pumps**
EACH PUMP	150mm	Unlimited size	660mm
VOLUME	**5 ML/day extraction capacity**	**80+ML/day/pump**	80 ML/day extraction capacity
COMMENCE TO PUMP THRESHOLDS	350 ML/day at Bourke Can extract A Class using small pumps at all flow heights above this minimum. Cotton growers never used A Class for their broadacre irrigation. Hence the pump size limit provided an effective self compliance strategy.	350 ML/day at Bourke Can extract at all flow heights above the minimum. Cotton growers convert their extraction classification to B Class as soon as flow conditions exceed B Class threshold. This raises a monitoring and compliance issue in retrospectively determining which flow class to attribute the extraction as it all occurs through the same pump	1250 ML/day at Bourke Can extract at all flow heights above this minimum