



SUBMISSION NO. 11

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The Secretary
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliament House
Canberra A.C.T. 2600

Dear Sir,

re: Future Water Supplies

Please accept this submission in respect of the above inquiry.

It would be extremely difficult for a lay person to make a detailed, informative submission without specialized knowledge in some aspect of the overall inquiry. This submission suffers from that defect and consequently will be limited to a few personal observations plus items of a more general interest. It is hoped it will still be of some benefit to your committee.

While the Inquiry title deals with rural industries and communities the Terms of Reference ensure that no aspect of the use of water can be overlooked. This in turn means every Australian has a vital interest in the outcome of the inquiry and no Australian citizen will remain unaffected by that outcome.

The Terms of Reference are also sufficiently broad as to enable the Committee to investigate any aspect of water use or water storage without deviating from their Terms. This is as it should be.

Publicity

As the deliberations and the findings of the Committee are so vital to the future of Australia and all its activities and its citizens both the deliberations and the findings should be given the widest possible exposure in all branches of the media.

This submission recommends a "Public Relations Professional" be attached to the Committee at all times. If this is not feasible such professional should be on call to ensure adequate publicity and allow the Committee to carry on, relieved of this particular aspect. The professional so engaged would need to know how to arrange the publicity, where it will do the most good, not to the Committee only but also the the general public and rural communities in particular.

Recycling

There is no doubt that recycling will form one of the major areas for full investigation. It will also form one of the main recommendations in the final report, at least in principle.

In 2000 the Queensland Government through its Department of Natural Resources undertook a major study which it titled "Queensland Water Recycling Strategy" (Q.W.R.S.). It called for further submissions and to assist those interested it published the following documents:-

Consultant Document
C.I.R.M. 1999 Demonstration and Research Water Recycling Background Study
D.N.R. 2000 Groundwater Recharge Background Study
D.P.I. 1999 Agricultural Water Recycling Background Study
Kinhill 1999 Industry Water Recycling Background Study
Nexus Australia 1999 Education Needs Background Study
PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2000 Economic Aspects of Water Recycling in Queensland Study
Queensland Environmental Law Association 2000 Legislation Background Study
QHSS and NRCETE 2000 WasteWater Recycling Health Effects Scoping Study
W.B.M. Oceanics Australia 1999 Stormwater Recycling Background Study
David White 1999 Urban Water Recycling Background Study

In October 2001 the Final Report became available.

The subject matter of all of the above is vital to the deliberations of your Committee. Copies may still be available from the Department of Natural Resources in Brisbane.

If not, the writer has copies of all except David White 1999 and these would be willingly made available to your Committee. They could be delivered to the office of your Chair Mrs Kay Elson M.P. They would remain the property of your Committee.

Please let me know your decision.

There is a considerable amount of recycling being carried out in Queensland already. It is mainly a Local Government activity and is of great benefit to golf clubs and similar community organisations. It is not recycled to potable (drinkable) standard. There are instances of recycled water going to irrigation (Hervey Bay sugar cane) and plans to supply industry. Toowoomba City Council will be supplying Millmerran Power Station when it commences operation.

There has also been one very large recycling operation that has been abandoned. Brisbane City Council would recycle water and it would be pumped up on the Darling Downs for irrigation. The Downs is suffering badly from insufficient water.

What recycling is being carried out so far involves both grey water and black water. The ramifications of recycling are such it could easily be the subject of its own inquiry.

Salinity

This is also a subject worthy of special attention. It has not yet emerged as a major problem in Queensland, although it has been suggested it could be within a few years. There are also differences as to exactly where the danger areas are.

This could involve short term, mid term and long terms solutions. So much has already been written about it and many groups have put forward their solutions as being the main or the only one.

There may well be different solutions for different areas. This may even extend to different action necessary between States. It is possibly safe to assume that each and every State will make submissions.

This would place heavy pressure on the Committee to establish some form of priorities, both by States and contents of submissions.

Should the Committee in its early stages list the various areas for consideration it is recommended that Salinity be considered with a degree of priority. Salinity is probably the most serious problem as it would appear to be spreading faster than other problems.

Subcommittees

Is it possible for the Committee to appoint subcommittees to allow more than one item to be investigated at the same time.

This submission would recommend such action be adopted if at all possible.

Eastern Seaboard Rivers

It is accepted that in the final report subjects that have been investigated cannot be treated in isolation. There must be a dove tailing by which the final report can be accepted by Parliament.

However in looking at the long term view those rivers on the east coast and which flow into the Pacific Ocean or the Tasman may be kept separate in the final report. These rivers when in flood and in some cases under normal flow rates will prove the final answer for rural industry and community.

It would not be expected of this Committee to do any more than a general comment. It could recommend a new Committee be set up to start looking at what might be involved.

Should it wish to be specific it could suggest the Burdekin River in Queensland and what it could do for the Murray Darling Basin if its flood waters could be diverted to the rivers which flow into the Darling River.

Co-operation

To be able to present to Parliament a comprehensive and successful report will require the co-operation of a great number of organizations beginning with the State Governments. Every other organizations with an interest in water will want to be heard and no doubt seek forcible protection.

The committee will be faced with some extremely difficult situations requiring even more difficult decisions.

Senate Committee

The Senate Committee on Environment, Communications Information Technology and the Arts has recently completed an investigation into Australia's Urban Water Management. The final report is due to be tabled in the Senate on 29th September 2002.

As nothing in the study of water can be overlooked it will be necessary to study this report as it could well impact on some aspect of rural water availability.

Water Harvesting

The committee will need to study water harvesting and lay down guidelines governing its operation.

While water harvesting needs to be encouraged it must not be carried out by one property in a way that deprives other properties of their share of available water.

A very large cotton growing property in S.W. Queensland has gone into water harvesting on a massive scale. It now holds more water than Sydney Harbour. Unfortunately graziers many kilometres away on the flood plains have lost so much of the flood water, sheep stocks have been cut by half and the whole future of these properties in jeopardy.

Blue Green Algae

The last paragraph in the Terms of Reference deals with "The Adequacy of Scientific Research". There has been much good work already conducted on algae. This could be continued and possibly co-ordinated by the Committee.

Sundry Items

The Committee could bring Australia into line with the accepted colour coding of pipes. The international code would be used under which pipes carrying recycled water is purple.

Rainwater tanks are covered in the final report of the Q.W.R.S.. They would also most likely to be covered in the forthcoming Senate report.

Evaporation in irrigation channels is very high. The Committee must move to endeavour to ensure these are as far as possible converted to pipes.

Where flood irrigation is used the Committee will need to examine the possibility of converting this to trickle irrigation.

Subsidies

The Queensland Government has initiated various systems to promote recycling. As already stated Local Government has been the main organizations under these schemes, but the schemes are not limited to Local Government. All applications are reviewed and decisions are based on merit.

Many areas requiring change such as irrigation channels etc may be owned by families as well as corporations. Without laying down too much in detail to start the Committee should examine the need for subsidies and include the possibility of subsidies in its final report. It may well be a 50/50 type operation in conjunction with State Governments.

Travel

Before finalising its report the Committee should visit capital cities and use those visits for its public meetings. This system has proved invaluable by previous Committees of both Houses.

Conclusion

The Committee will face many complicated and difficult questions.

This submission wishes the Committee and its Members every possible success in its deliberations, and a final report that will reflect much credit on its work and its Members.

Above all that the final report will go a long way to solving water problems in rural industries and communities.

Copy of Final Report

A request is made for a copy of the final report when it becomes available.



Arnold Sandell