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Murray Darling Basin Water Utilisation Enquiry.

Task for Consideration.

A study into the feasibility of diverting excess flows in the Burdekin River into the Murray –Darling Basin with the object of augmenting water available for food production.

Premise.

1. Any investigation into the use and distribution of available water within the Murray-Darling Basin should explore the possibility of increasing that water.
2. The Murray-Darling Basin is the major food-producing region of Australia. Its viability and sustainability must continue to be enhanced if Australia is to feed its anticipated population growth.
3. The Snowy Mountains Scheme is an iconic work of infrastructure which has contributed immeasurably to Australia's wealth and has provided growth and security to large areas of regional Australia. The time is now appropriate to consider its duplication.

Assumed Benefits.

Economic. --- Agriculture has always been a major contributor to Australia's wealth. As the world's population continues to grow there will be increased demands upon our agricultural exports. All agricultural produce has its genesis in water. Australia's erratic rainfall has severely curtailed production in vast areas of the Murray-Darling Basin which are ideally suited to irrigation development. The average rainfall in the Burdekin Basin provides an opportunity to harvest a volume of water which far surpasses that which falls in the entire Murray-Darling Basin. Adequate remnant flow must remain within the Burdekin.

Social. --- 1. A secure supply of water can provide for stable population growth. Australia is becoming an increasingly

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urbanised nation with our major cities suffering from infrastructure collapse. Land for residential development is diminishing in availability and subsequent locations are involving commuters in excessive loss of time available for production, leisure or family commitments.

2. During construction of the Snowy Mountains Scheme Australia was haven for many thousands of refugees and asylum seekers from war-ravaged Europe. They were welcomed but had to agree to a two year commitment to work when and where as directed. Large numbers worked on the Snowy. They took the opportunity to take advantage of high wages and many of them accumulated considerable personal wealth. There are now many well-established second and third generation families which can trace their Australian ancestry back to the Snowy Mountains Scheme. Australia is now in a similar position to accommodate those wishing to take advantage of the opportunities available in Australia.

Environmental. --- The welcome drought-breaking rains which have fallen over most of the Murray-Darling Basin this year have demonstrated quite remarkably just how well the Australian countryside can respond when water is available. Bird populations are not only growing dramatically in the Menindee Lakes but along all the waterways and catchments within the system. Microbial activity within the soil is at a level not seen for many years.

Precedent.

Though the success of the Snowy Mountains Scheme is beyond doubt some mistakes were made viz. – 1. Residual flow remaining for the Snowy River was insufficient.

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2. Little or no allowance was made to encourage wetlands or native forests within the Murray Basin.

3. Monocultures were allowed to develop in excessively large areas.

The challenges posed by these problems can be avoided by the benefit of hindsight and the application of forward planning.

A First Step.

An independent group should be tasked with the aim of examining all aspects of Economic, Social and Environmental outcomes of any proposed Burdekin diversion. A Business Plan which considers all costs and benefits should be developed and presented to the nation by way of referendum at the next federal election so that it can be accepted or rejected. Everyone should be made aware that if such a mammoth project is adopted its construction will extend over many electoral cycles and parliamentary terms of different governments and thus argument and debate should extend beyond the usual adversarial style of party politics.

A Biblical Guide.

There is good advice as told in “The Parable of the Three Servants” [Matthew 25.] where a master entrusts his capital to three servants for safekeeping. One servant buries his share in the ground while the other two take theirs to invest and grow.

When the master returns the servants with the improved capital are rewarded.

Could it be that God has bequeathed this dry, arid country and said, “Here, see what you can do with this.”

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Religious beliefs matter not but there is an obligation on all to improve the capital which we have inherited.

Declaration of Interest.

As an eater with grandchildren who have inherited the habit I declare that my family has a vested interest in the maintenance and enhancement of sustainable food production in the Murray-Darling Basin.

R.J.[Bob]d Muir. 20/11/2010.