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STATES GRANTS (WATER RESOURCES ASSESSMENT) BILL

Date Introduced: 3 November 1976
House: House of Representatives
Presented by: The Honourable P.J. Nixon, M.P. Minister for National Resources

Short Digest of Bill

This Bill provides for the continuation of assistance to the States in the conduct of coordinated programmes for the assessment of the quantity and quality of water resources both surface and underground. Assistance to the States was initiated by the States Grants (Water Resources) Act of 1964. This was passed as a result of recommendations made by the Australian Water Resources Council which was established in 1962 by agreement between the Commonwealth and all State Governments.

The Council was set up with the objective of providing a comprehensive assessment of Australian water resources on a continuing basis, and the extension of measurement and research so that future planning can be carried out on a sound and scientific basis. The Council consists of Commonwealth and State Ministers with responsibilities for water resources. In a publication “Review of Australia’s Water Resources” (1963) the Council explained the importance of making a comprehensive and continuing assessment of water resources on a national basis. It made these points:

(a) Data is necessary for the economic and safe design, operation and management of water control projects.

(b) Australia is the world’s driest continent. There is a real need to know the potential and limitations of water resources.

(c) Water resources have a bearing on population growth, decentralisation of population and industry, increasing exports, improving standards of living and national defence.

The work involved in water resources assessment is being carried out in close collaboration with the Bureau of Meteorology which is making detailed assessments of rainfall distribution for the Water Resources Council.

The Water Resources Council has appreciated that stream gauging could not be sufficiently comprehensive to embrace the whole continent. Many streams would remain ungauged. The network of gauging stations could not provide data to enable more general assessments of catchment areas. To overcome this deficiency the Australian Representative Basins Program has been devised by the Council. Under this Australia-wide program up to 100 carefully selected representative catchments are being assessed in detail. From the data collected it will be possible to estimate the likely water resources in areas between catchments. The data recorded in each

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catchment includes climatic conditions, geology, soil types, topography and vegetation. Measurements are made of rainfall, stream flows, evaporation, humidity, solar radiation, groundwater storage, and underground water movements.

Since 1964, States Grants (Water Resources) Acts have provided assistance to the States for measurement of both streams and underground water resources. The basis for assistance is a grant of an amount which a State spends over and above a base amount. For each State a maximum amount of grant is provided for. Expenditure by a State up to twice the base amount attracts a grant equal to the excess over the base amount. Further expenditure by a State is funded on a dollar for dollar basis until the maximum amount of grant is payable. The amount of Commonwealth assistance provided in the present Bill and available for each State has been allocated in accordance with an agreement of the Australian Water Resources Council.

Earlier Acts, i.e. since 1964, covering successive three year periods have provided total grants to the States of $31.4m over 12 years. These Acts are concerned with measurement of discharge of rivers and investigation and measurement of underground water resources. During this period the number of river gauging stations has increased from 1450 to 2750, measurement of surface water by 40% and underground measurement by 1/3.

In 1974 the program of work for the measurement of water resources was expanded to embrace assessment of quality of surface and underground water. This broadening of the work being done is reflected in the Bill by defining “assessment” to include measurement of flow and quantity, examination of quality and the work of recording, arrangement, analysis or publication of information.

The Bill makes available $6.658 for 1976/77 which enables Commonwealth assistance to be maintained in real terms. Levels of assistance for the years 1977/78 and 1978/79 are to be determined before the commencement of these years.

Defence, Science and Technology.
10 November, 1976