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Submission to the 2020 Summit - 2008

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

22 JAN 2011

Supply of Reliable Irrigation Water, North East RECEIVED

The aim of the project is to provide a reliable supply of water for the irrigation of essential fruit and vegetables in the north-east of Victoria, by way of desalination via Lakes Entrance, Omeo and Dartmouth. I provide the following reasons, and outline the proposal below.

Reasons in Support of Proposal

- . Southern Australia is set to increasingly experience drought conditions.
- . Wind, increased temperatures (both night and day), drying soil and more dust storms are set to hamper growing conditions. New GM crops will be of enormous benefit.
- . Coastal plains will become increasingly under threat from torrential rain delivering floods, from storm surges and inevitably rising sea levels.
- . Sheltered, as it were, behind the Great Dividing Range, the foodbowl here may thus have a good chance of producing enough essential fruit and vegetables for south-eastern Australia. Pasture for dairy, hay and grapes would not be covered, while rice is an "opportunity" crop.
- . The cost of imported food, plus the inclusive cost of rising transport costs - if and when excess food is available - will rise steadily in the near future as disasters increasingly hit the rest of the world (as with wheat now).
- . Against the cost of the infrastructure involved in the project, Australia "grows" its own iron and steel, while the provision of wave, wind, solar and geothermal energy is set to grow.

The Proposal

- . A large desalination plant to be built in the Lakes Entrance area.
- . The residual saline solution to be piped east into the East Australia Current, NOT into the swirly currents of Bass Strait.
- . By the time this is agreed to and built, clean energy of various types will be available to power the plant.

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 Secretary: SL.....

Supply of Reliable Irrigation Water, North East Victoria

- . The pipes carrying the water would travel a distance of 120k along the valley that cuts north into the Great Dividing Range, following beside the Great Alpine Road.
- . The finish point would be the Omeo Valley at 900m.
- . At the little township of Benambra in this valley the Mitta River loops back on itself on its way to Dartmouth Dam. It is here the desalinated water would empty into the Mitta River.
- . The water would be stored in the deep Dartmouth Dam. When needed at irrigation time, it would be released to flow down the Mitta to the Hume Dam and thence to Yarrawonga and the irrigation channels that offshoot from that pondage.

I respectfully submit this proposal for your consideration.

(Mrs) Chris Sobey

Stolen water ^{2/12/10} never paid for

A COUPLE of years ago the Victorian Women's Trust published *Our Water Mark*.

It was filled with useful information and gave me cause to follow the Murray River's fortunes.

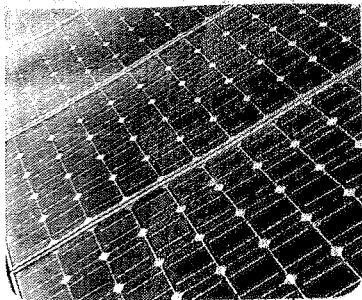
Early November 2009, I noted a rapid increase in the water gushing past Albury over a period of three or four days.

A call to the commission office at Deniliquin resulted in the Murray dropping back to the correct height within a matter of hours. The Kiewa perhaps? Surely not.

An occasional check on the height over the rest of the summer was done and in April, when the irrigation season was done, the Hume Dam stood at 15 per cent, a full 10 per cent over the often 5 per cent of recent years.

In January 2007 *The Border Mail* published my letter, with an accompanying editorial on the disappearance out of the Murray of 360 gigalitres of water after all calculations were done.

The resultant silence on the issue was deafening.



Solar investment ^{30/12/10} a better solution

THE government's proposal to pay \$2 billion of taxpayers' money to the shareholders of the Hazelwood power station in order to close just one quarter of that coal-fired power supply has me searching for better ways of spending the hard-earned dollars of working families, both rural and city.

Having to pay out shareholders of a private company irks me, but being a forced closure, apparently this has to be done.

But here, perhaps, is a more positive way to go about it.

Solar electricity can now be generated via the sun's rays causing

The late Peter Cullen spoke of the theft of water from both river water and groundwater sources, saying how irrigation gates were opened illegally, or water entitlements sold off and a bore put in close to the river, and water taken for free.

The matter of balance in the distribution of water resources has not, in the past, been an issue.

Now when the boot is on the other foot and we try to save a dying river system, it's a different story and "balance" is a must have.

Nobody paid the taxpayer coffers for the lost water, while now the irrigators are screaming for the taxpayers to buy them out if required.

— CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

the air itself to heat and thereby turn the turbines.

No water is involved.

Could the \$2 billion be put towards the cost of such a plant, thereby creating the legitimate competition of clean versus dirty power.

The choice of energy source would be ours, while the choice is also there for the Hazelwood shareholders to decide where to invest.

We don't want wind turbines in our backyards, nor coalmines, nor nuclear plants, and are we really happy about gas-fired power stations scattered through the suburbs of Melbourne, as is currently being suggested?

I'd be happy to put money into a solar farm, just a tad out of the city where the sun shines brightest.

How about you?

— CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

13/1/11 Letters

Time for water referendum

I FIND it an interesting phenomenon that the taxpayers of western NSW and South Australia are being called on by the federal government to help fund the restoration of flooded eastern Queensland.

The Murray-Darling basin has had such appalling management in the past that the southern section nearly died, but the people of Queensland stood by and watched and didn't give a tuppenny cuss what happened lower down.

The Queensland Government refused to release any of its water to save a stricken river system, yet is not objecting to donations from those taxpayers to help clean up its stricken towns.

For all I have given a donation to the cause, I can see the need to articulate these tensions.

Unless the basin authority can be given overriding authority to manage the ground and surface waters with greater fairness, I can imagine many a future flood dance being performed out South Australia way.

Perhaps the issue of the Murray-Darling basin deserves a referendum on whether state boundaries should be removed in the interests of the basin, its food and its people.

Surely it's as important an issue as the republic, and deserving of more than the politics of the day.

— Mrs CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

Stop logging in catchments

IN light of the *Four Corners* television program (ABC TV, October 2) on logging and the Maryvale Mill, I would urge readers to contact state and federal parliaments calling for cessation of the logging of our precious water catchments.

I now realise where the many phone calls I received came from, abusing me roundly for my letters to this paper decrying the continual logging of our native forests for woodchips and toilet paper, let alone photocopy paper.

Not only do these huge companies donate generously to the major political parties to secure their desired outcomes, we taxpayers also subsidise the logging of our public forests by private companies.

Meanwhile, on the NSW side of the Murray Irrigation Channel, the red gum forests are also being blatantly logged to supply Melbourne (who have access to cheap gas) with wood for their winter fires.

Enough is enough.

Wakey-wakey people, and let government at all levels know we're concerned.

9/06 — Mrs CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

Dry may strike power supply

THE possibility of this drought extending for some years is now very real.

It is of increasing concern to me where the water will come from (recycled or otherwise) to run our coal-fired power plants (clean or otherwise).

NSW power plants alone use one fifth as much water as Sydney's four million population.

The desalination plants also use copious amounts of electricity to make fresh water.

And how much of a back-up system will the Snowy be with no snow?

In regard to a possible nuclear power plant for Australia, the world only has about 35 years supply of known uranium reserves and much of that is low grade.

If it takes 15 years or so to get a plant up and running, the viability of this power source is also questionable.

Australia currently ships natural gas overseas, up through the dangerous straits of Indonesia.

Will we be allowed to keep enough to use ourselves? We haven't much of a defence force.

But, hooray! Our country is blessed not only with copious sunlight and wind power, but also with a readily accessible geothermal base load power source that cannot be stolen and is free of harmful emissions.

However, nor can it be traded like coal or uranium, and I suspect that is why South Australia and the Feds are largely keeping it under wraps.

I would ask what contingency plans the Federal Government has for power failure in light of the above possibilities.

And where would you prefer to see our taxpayer dollars spent — coal, nuclear or geothermal?

4/12/06 — MRS CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

Mitta paddle a real adventure

3/1/07
THE article on Dartmouth Dam, (*The Border Mail*, Thursday December 28, 2006), prompts me to write this.

A couple of weeks ago I took the opportunity of a fast flowing Mitta River to travel its length from the Shark's Tooth just below Dartmouth to the Hume Weir village.

Do it now, I thought, as goodness only knows when it will fill and flow like this again.

A trip of approximately 300km, I took a bit of camping gear with me in my old home-made canoe and enjoyed three days on the river, dodging rocks and trees, hurtling around corners and keeping out from the willows.

Racing along at about 9kmh, in the early stages it was exciting, more peaceful in the latter.

Of great interest was the section across the eastern end of the Mitta arm of the weir where it winds back and forth through mud flats and dead timber.

All this time it maintained its fast pace, while being kept within its channel by what looked like man-made clay banks at times.

Was this to stop the formation of a vast, shallow lake?

At times it became almost elevated, with the land falling away in great dry depressions to the hills on either side.

Finally, right near the end, water began spilling out of the river to the sides.

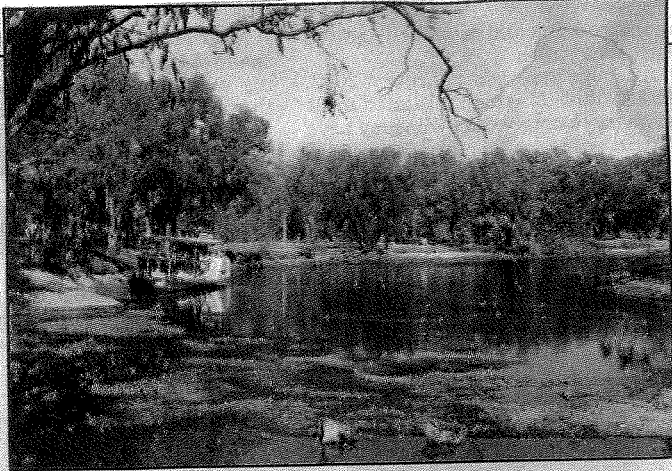
Then at last, as I turned a corner, a little fall was before me and over I went.

The Mitta finished its helter-skelter run just like that.

Deep water and then the long slog across the open water to the Weir village.

And so ended a great little impromptu adventure — thank you, Mitta!

— CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury



● Faulty meters may be draining the Murray River.

River's 'missing billions' leaves tough questions

THE news in *The Weekend Australian* that billions of litres of water (not thousands, or millions, but billions) have been siphoned from the Murray River by irrigators with faulty meters is deeply disturbing at this time of critical water shortages.

I guess that, according to the law of averages, there would be as many meters delivering less water as there were delivering too much.

Is this the case, or were they all oversupplying?

Further to my last letter regarding compensation to farmers as the effects of global warming hit, I wonder in this instance of massive oversupply (strange that the irrigators could have been so wilfully ignorant of it) they will be asked to instead repay the public purse.

After all, they are always the first to cry foul at any hint of less water.

When we are ready to expose any service station overcharging for petrol, and catch people breaking water restrictions, why is this matter being swept under the carpet?

Where's the "fair go for all" in this?

Perhaps our federal member, Sussan Ley, can give us an answer to these questions?

She has, after all, vigorously defended the rights of the irrigators.

With the likelihood of a ban on all outside watering before June in Adelaide, plus 30 towns in the rain-starved Murray-Darling Basin, incidents of abuse as above, plus that of the cattleman on the high plains flouting the law because of a loophole when the rest of his mates have to toe the line, leaves a bitter taste in one's mouth.

— Mrs CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

1/3/07

Don't lift water restrictions

THE increasingly dire water situation has had me worried of late, and phone calls to local councils did nothing to ease my mind.

With Lake Hume rapidly retreating to a level below the river outlets, resulting in a river without a flow, and Albury-Wodonga on only level 1 restrictions, I was flabbergasted to learn that even this restriction could shortly be lifted.

The mind boggles when you see the desolation of the weir and know that maybe no restrictions are necessary as we're under the daily use.

Then in the middle of the night the answer came, at least to my satisfaction.

Yarrawonga, with its full lake, gets the tourist dollars while Albury-Wodonga gets to keep its water-hungry industries operating — read employment.

Water restrictions at a level suitable to a near empty dam would curtail water usage to these industries, with workers off right, left and centre.

That's the way I see it.

Albury-Wodonga will get the 33 million litres left in the lake trucked to the water treatment works, but Corowa?

Poor old Corowa seems to be the "meat in the sandwich", as it were.

And we must remember that 33 million litres is what Roxby Downs pumps out of the Great Artesian Basin — for free — every day.

— CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

Desalination to help many

TAKING up Graeme Scott's ideas of desalinated sea water for the food bowl via Dartmouth (*The Border Mail*, January 9), it's interesting to ponder it further.

If the desalination plant was built near Lakes Entrance, the fresh water could be piped to Omeo following the relatively level route of the Great Alpine Road.

10/1/08

Once at Omeo (Benambra) it could be fed into the Mitta River.

During autumn and winter it would fill the two storages, namely Dartmouth and Hume, feeding off down the Murray during the spring and summer.

It could fill Tallangatta's little stone-built storage as it goes.

Thinking further, could energy-efficient pumps get desalinated water from the NSW south coast up over the Snowy Mountains and into that system to feed the Murrumbidgee?

And for the Ovens, instead of a Melbourne offtake, perhaps a big pipe from Mulwala to Mokoan and on to Shepparton?

But what would happen with all the salt?

Increased temperatures are meaning increased evaporation from soil and water, which is what differentiates this particular dry spell from previous droughts.

Should the water be sent down the rivers in great pipes, while still allowing for the rivers to naturally flood?

This is "global" warming.

Countries the world over will increasingly experience trouble providing food for their own population, let alone exporting any.

Any fuel for transport in the years ahead?

The cost of desalinating and

piping megalitres of water to give us a relatively assured food supply will be a one-off cost for infrastructure, but put that against the future financial, and human, cost of fighting for food from countries far away?

And lastly, Australia's foodbowl shelters behind the Great Dividing Range, free of increasingly violent floods and storm surges that will zap the coastal plains.

The idea sounds good, well thought Graeme.

— MRS CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

See submission to "2020 Summit"

Salt questions must be asked

NORSKE Skog's dumping of four tonnes of salt a day (1500 tonnes per year), mixed into three megalitres of recycled water, should be ringing alarm bells in us all.

It certainly astounds me that Canberra, perhaps more than the NSW Government, can possibly allow this to take place.

The NSW Environment Protection Authority has approved the plan on the basis that twice this quantity will supposedly be removed from the Billabong Creek which flows into the Murray way out west at Kyalite.

The only trouble with this supposition is that Billabong doesn't really flow any more — take a look next time you drive to Culcairn or Walla Walla — it's little more than a series of ponds.

How do you, economically, extract salt from a dry creek?

More to the point, why aren't the shareholders of this foreign company putting up the money for evaporation ponds on the Norske Skog property?

The mill doesn't want to kill its pines with this potent mixture, so it'll kill our river instead.

Certainly the Norwegian embassy in Canberra expressed interest in the matter when I contacted it.

Our summer swimming hole at Noreuil Park will become contaminated by the dispersal of this highly saline solution just a few hundred metres upstream, while the low flow generally common in winter can only be highly destructive of our once mighty Murray's riverine environment.

Norske Skog got us all well and truly hoodwinked. Why aren't local universities protesting?

Certainly questions will be asked of the NSW Water Minister when Parliament resumes this month.

— Mrs CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

20/10/09



● The Darling River may pick up future residual lows of cyclones.

Climate change watershed

IT'S interesting to note that the Kimberley area of north-west Australia, long touted as a water source for our cities and usually the recipient of flooding rain over the summer months, has this year missed out completely.

Were a pipeline to be constructed to bring water to Perth, that city would be in for a dry year.

Asa Wahlquists's book *Thirsty Country* (in Albury City library) spells out the costs to provide water to our cities.

I am curious to see whether the cyclones that are forecast to head further south down the Queensland coast in coming years, will sweep inland over south-east Queensland and send water down the Darling River.

I wonder if the roles of the Murray and the Darling will reverse, with the Murray's flow dwindling while the Darling picks up the residual lows of the cyclones.

— Mrs CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

Letters to the e

Where's water for mill power?

THE article on the planned \$100 million power plant for Norske Skog (*The Border Mail*, March 18) is indeed interesting.

The steam to turn the turbines for electricity and provide steam for processing purposes requires hundreds of gigalitres of water.

Electricity production, whether by coal (clean or dirty), gas, methane or biomass, requires fresh water in quantities that are becoming of real concern to the governments of south-east Australia.

The Murray River is failing, yet in the past 20 years we have doubled the amount of water pulled out of it, while trebling the amount taken from the ground (artesian) for irrigation alone.

The viability of Snowy Hydro is also now very questionable, while studies have shown water uptake by mountain ash regrowth, following bushfire or logging, can reduce water yield in our catchments in those disturbed areas by 50 per cent of predisturbance runoff rates for many years afterwards.

Perhaps the mill should be looking at electricity production from a non-water source, such as that being organised for the steel mill at Whyalla which will use ammonia instead of Murray River water.

And maybe it's time to take a longer view of the viability of the big industries along the upper reaches of our river that are heavily dependent on water, whether that be surface or ground, the latter public-owned being taken entirely free of charge.

This, too, needs to change.

A coastal situation close to desalination may need to be explored. It may not occur to the shareholders of Norske Skog in Norway that water in south-eastern Australia, especially west of the Great Divide, is a bit on the scarce side.

— Mrs CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

Wasting taxes to fix bungles

THE hullabaloo over the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's draft proposal by the irrigators, whipped up by their industry organisations, has me as angry as they are. But my anger is at the appalling damage dealt out to the riverine system by over-allocation, poor management and greed.

The other major objection I have is the way governments are using taxpayer dollars in three major areas.

Firstly, taxpayers are having their hard-earned dollars used to fund this buy-back scheme in the order of billions of dollars, when there was little if any consultation about the irrigator entitlements to water being written into their land deeds in the first place.

It's called being sneaky. Now we're having to bail them out as things go progressively awry.

Secondly, taxpayer dollars, again in the order of billions, are being spent to fix a hastily conceived and badly organised insulation scheme.

Thirdly, taxpayer funds have been used on the soon-to-be white

elephant that is the north-south pipeline.

I'm pleased to learn that the Bureau of Meteorology will shortly have an audit plan coming into effect monitoring all the in and outflows within the basin system, which will prevent Mr Brumby spiriting water out of the long-suffering basin for Melbourne.

When suburban rail networks and other infrastructure across the nation are needing big investment, government funding (taxpayers' dollars) is being handed out willy-nilly on erupting crises whose initial implementation required wider and longer consultation.

Get your acts into gear, governments, and stop throwing away hard-earned public funds.

22/10/10 — Mrs CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury

17/9/10 'll pay to stop climate change

CHECKING the monthly rainfall figures for our area from April to present, I was interested to find that April, June and July were down by 70 millimetres on the total average, while May and August were up by 25 millimetres.

It's generally the case that a very wet autumn and winter will culminate in a flood.

However, this year it has taken sudden deluge over 24 hours to deliver a flood.

It's an unusual occurrence, exacerbated by rain falling on a heavy bill of snow.

Following our long, deep dry and catastrophic weather events worldwide, for this flood to arise so rapidly is proof enough for me that global warming is real and happening now.

Man's continuing pollution of the fragile and thin atmosphere, along with increasing population growth, sending CO2 emissions rocketing and accordingly, the world climates are going haywire.

For the sake of our following generations, I hope our government will take a leading role in drastically cutting emissions as of this year.

As with all forms of insurance, I am prepared to pay a price for the transfer to a clean energy future — a livable future for my children rather than the bleak prospect they now face.

— CHRIS SOBEY,
Albury