

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 90
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 4
Programme: Water (WTR)
Topic: Menindee Lakes
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 23 February 2015
Question Type: Written

Senator Xenophon asked:

I refer to an article in the Stock Journal of 16 Feb 2015 that highlights concerns over the security of Broken Hill's water supply. The article reports that storages are due to run out in about 12 months.

1. Is the Department aware of these reports and is it consulting with the NSW Office of Water to address this?
2. What consultations have taken place?
3. Have there been too many delays in getting works off the ground to improve efficiency of the Lakes and address the water evaporation?

Answer:

- 1-3. The Department is aware of the current situation in regards to Broken Hill's water supply. The provision of urban water supply to Broken Hill and the development of a water efficiency and savings project at the Menindee Lakes is the responsibility of the New South Wales Government, however, the Department is in regular contact with New South Wales Office of Water officials.

Management of the Menindee Lakes is currently the responsibility of the NSW Government, consistent with Menindee management arrangements.

Consultation is primarily the responsibility of the NSW Office of Water. In addition to the Department's regular contact with NSW Office of Water, the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Bob Baldwin MP, and the Minister for Health, the Hon Sussan Ley MP, met with Broken Hill community representatives in January 2015 to discuss the concerns of the community.

The Menindee Lakes are very complex and the development of an appropriate project and reconfiguration of their operation requires detailed hydrological, engineering and technical investigations, including of groundwater as a potential emergency water supply option for Broken Hill. The aim of this work is to ensure that a cost effective option is developed, whilst accounting for Broken Hill's water supply, needs of the local environment, and supply to downstream water users.