

Inquiry into the Water Amendment (Saving the Goulburn and Murray Rivers) Bill 2008

Public Submission

David T. Bath

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I thank the committee for the opportunity to make a submission relating to this bill.

I fully support the bill's intent, to improve the prospect that the Goulburn and Murray rivers might become viable again, and thus that the communities relying on those waters might be sustainable.

The form of the bill will very probably help achieve those objectives in part, although this it is hardly a complete solution to current and future problems, so many other significant policy initiatives with broader and longer-term perspectives are required.

The immediate effect of this bill appears to be the halting of Victoria's "North-South Pipeline", which is currently under construction despite

- significant public opposition as reported in the media;
- commencing before a pertinent Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry ("Melbourne's Future Water Supply"ⁱ) by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee) was even open for submissions from the public; and
- the vast majority of over a hundred public submissionsⁱⁱ to that inquiry arguing against one or both of the Victorian Government's flawed water-supply projects: the "North-South Pipeline" and desalination plants, rather than other more effective and cost-efficient alternatives.

It can be expected the Victorian Government, as well as private contractors who are or will gain financial benefit from the construction and operation of the pipeline, will argue against this bill, claiming that the North-South Pipeline is essential to the well-being of Victorians, and possibly even argue counterfactually that the Goulburn River and its tributaries are not explicitly covered by the "Water For Rivers" agreement between Commonwealth, NewSouth Wales and Victorian Governments.

Despite such claims that the North-South Pipeline, which would be rendered illegitimate by this bill, is in the interest of Victorians, it is evident from both the media and the submissions to the Victorian ENRC Inquiry that this bill would receive near-universal support from Victorian citizens, as well as the citizens of South Australia who will be significantly harmed any operation of the North-South Pipeline.

Indeed, it would have been reasonable for the Victorian Government to conclude that the North-South Pipeline would contravene the agreement between Commonwealth and Victoria from 2003 and the Water Act 2007 (Cth) even without the proposed amendments, and thus should not have commenced the project and associated commercial negotiations.

I urge the committee to recommend that the bill is passed and receive assent as soon as possible.

I further urge that federal agencies bring immediate pressure on the Victorian Government to cease all work on its North-South Pipeline and any similar projects, both to protect the rivers consistent with the intent of this bill and the current Water Act 2007, as well as prevent further harm to the public purse.

Yours sincerely,

David T. Bath

Public Submission to the Inquiry into the Water Amendment (Saving the Goulburn and Murray Rivers) Bill 2008

- i Inquiry into Melbourne's Future Water Supply, Environment and Natural Resources Committee of the Victorian Parliament :
<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/enrc/inquiries/water/default.htm>
- ii Public submissions to the Inquiry into Melbourne's Future Water Supply :
<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/enrc/inquiries/water/submissions.html>