

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

**SUBMISSION**

**Mary J. Chandler,**

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

I would like to thank the Senate for the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry into Water Amendment (Saving the Goulburn and Murray Rivers) Bill 2008 to be reported by 27 March 2009.

The Senate had the ideal opportunity to act when it sent amendments to the Water Bill back down to the lower house. When the amendments were knocked back by the lower house, instead of standing its ground, the Senate caved in, and allowed the amendments to be removed from the Bill.

Once again the Senate has another chance to curb the amount of water taken from the Murray Darling Basin, especially via the North-South Pipeline which will take 75 GL from the Goulburn River, water essential to rural Victorians living north of the divide, and pump it to Melbourne. The Private Members Bill introduced by Senator Birmingham has instigated the water Amendment (Saving the Goulburn and Murray Rivers) Bill to the Committee for inquiry and report by March 27, 2009.

This time the Inquiry could recommend that the Senate go ahead with the Amendment (Saving the Goulburn and Murray Rivers) Bill. This goes a long way into really looking after the Murray - strong and immediate action is required now, and I implore the Inquiry to urge that this Amendment is acted upon. It is action, not talk that is required, otherwise future generations will look upon the current Governments, state and federal, with disgust. How will they ever believe that no one took any action but let things drift on until it was too late to do anything?

Yes, we have had years of drought, but that is not the only reason why the Murray Darling Basin is in such a sorry state. Over-allocation, Management Investment Schemes and worst of all Water Trading have lead to the demise of our rivers. And the Governments have all sat back and let it happen. Queensland and New South Wales allow gigalitres of water to be taken out, so that water no long travels down the Darling to the Murray River. And those licences have been sold to overseas people, who sell water back to irrigators at exorbitant prices so that irrigation areas are being destroyed.

People from Victorian by water from the north or visa versa and it is removed from the Murray, even when it is not actually available there. A reasoned approach has to be taken, and Senator Birmingham's water Amendment at least asks that no new water is taken out and it goes a long way to providing action that should be taken.

This is about the fifth submission I have written with respect to water, the Murray, the Goulburn and the North-South Pipeline in the last twelve months, the last one also to the Senate. To those of us who live in Victoria, particularly along the Murray River, who are witnessing the affects the drought, climate change and proposals such as the North-South Pipeline are having on rural Victoria, it is totally frustrating to place submission after submission in to Governments that take no notice whatsoever to damage being caused to the natural environment and diverse ecology of the Murray Darling Basin's rivers and their iconic wetlands and the rural communities who are stressing so badly as they watch permanent plantings, in the case of the Sunraysia area, die before their eyes.

It is so difficult to raise oneself to the challenge of yet one more submission that will again be ignored as politics came to the fore once again.

The Victorian Government irresponsibly proposes to increase the size of Melbourne until it rivals and surpasses Sydney,

without giving consideration to resources such as water, transport and infrastructure, it ignores the use of renewable energy, the use of storm water and recycled waste water at least for parks, gardens and industry and by claiming the proposed water savings through its Food Bowl Modernisation Project, has added Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong and other cities and towns to recently built pipelines extracting water from the Goulburn, as well as proposing to constructing this new pipeline to take water to Melbourne. It is depriving both irrigators and the environment of water essential to the parched north of Victoria.

The people of the city of Melbourne will never learn that water is a precious resource, whilst water is taken from the Goulburn and the “biggest” desalination plant in Australia, the 200GL plant to be built at Wonthaggi/Kileunda area because “Melbourne people are sick of water restrictions.” Why not build two smaller plants on the Geelong side, the dry side of the State to supply water to Geelong, Ballarat and Melbourne instead?

And the Brumby Government is hypocritical, because whilst it places advertisements on television showing how much energy households use, it plans to build two new pumping stations to pump water into the North-South Pipeline and a huge pumping station to extract water for the desalination plant, thus creating huge amounts of greenhouse gas.

Piping 75 GL of water each year for a city the previously has not relied on it as a source of water is an act of vandalism on the production of food from northern Victoria and the Sunraysia area. Does this mean the Victorian Government really has so little concern for its rural constituents, their well-being and food production, that it is quite happy to purchase food from China, Asia and other countries and forget about food production and the affect it will have on these communities when their means of livelihood disappear? And what happens when there is a world shortage of food?

Over allocation and population explosion has caused most of the problems with the Murray-Darling Basin and our rivers. I would recommend that you read “Overloading Australia - How governments and media dither and deny on population” by Mark O’Connor and William J. Lines, published by Envirobook, 7-9 Close Street, Canterbury NSW 2193, telephone 02 9787-1955.

A population cap and population size is something that no government appears to have tackled, but as we are the driest continent on earth facing the prospect of climate change, this should be looked at by all States and the Federal Government.

I would like to quote from page 89 of this publication:

*“Both Victoria and South Australia, for example. Have policies designed to increase population. In a 2004 report, “Beyond Five Million: The Victorian Government’s Population Policy,” the State Government detailed the ways Victoria might gain an extra 1 million people by 2025. Also in 2004, the South Australian government released “Prosperity Through People: A Population Policy for South Australia.” Here the government stated its aim to double the state’s population growth rate and, on the way, achieve a population of 2 million by 2050, up from 1.5 million in 2004.*

*Both states also announced a commitment to sustainability. But while population policies came with detailed prescriptions on how to increase population. sustainability policies lacked all such detail. At best they implied that technology would secure sustainability. The ways and means of sustainability, however, remained unspecified.*

*There was a good reason for the vagueness: the task of simultaneously increasing population and achieving sustainability is impossible. Already by 2004 Victoria had one of the largest eco-footprints in the world. As well, according to the Victorian Environmental Protection Authority, Victorians were using nature more rapidly than it could regenerate.*

*And that was not all. A CSIRO study on Victoria's sustainability found that the state's landscape was already 'probably the most stressed in the country.' About 35% of the state's major rivers were in poor or very poor condition, and about 44% of native plants were thought to be extinct or threatened. Meanwhile, water use had spiralled: Erosion, salinity, and acidity were reducing agricultural productivity across 3 million hectares of farming country. The state was moving further and further from sustainability.*

*On top of that the state was drying out. In the 10 years to 2006, Melbourne and the surrounding areas suffered the most extreme drop in rainfall of any urban area in Australia, except perhaps for Perth. Not once in the previous decade had Melbourne had even what is supposed to be its average rainfall. 220 towns and cities across the state were on water restrictions and the state faced an expected dip of 20% in rainfall over the next 25 years.*

*Page 90..... "Other letter writers continued the argument, proving more astute and courageous than journalists and columnists. "We have been told" one wrote "that Melbourne must 'populate or perish' and that by 2030 we must absorb another million residents. The question that Planning Minister, Justin Madden should ponder is: how do we cater for increased population given that our rivers, dams and reservoirs are drying up, the drought shows no sign of breaking, one-third of the state is affected by bushfires, and blackouts are becoming commonplace? Should we tell the Government to ditch Melbourne 2030 and its population plan?"*

This argument that population growth should be capped seems to me a very valid argument. What is the point of attempting to deal with the water question without looking at population growth? When irrigation began along the Murray, much smaller areas were used for irrigation and the population along the Murray and Melbourne was much smaller. Over the years, increasing amounts of water have continued to be taken from the Murray and Goulburn Rivers and this is just not sustainable.

Managed Investment Schemes seem to have completed the destruction of the small irrigator this century.

To use a further quote from “Overloading Australia” from the bottom of page 182, ‘Wasting Water’:

*“We believe in public spiritedness and wish we could endorse appeals to ‘conserve water.’ Yet, our analysis shows that until we get restraint in population there is no point in citizens saving water. If they do, this will not mean that their neighbours get more water for their gardens, or that tougher restrictions will be postponed. Rather, it means that politicians will be able to continue their irresponsible dream of putting over a million extra people in each of our three biggest cities over the next 25 years (and proportionately even more into Perth.) So long as we have such misguided leaders, any water-restraint shown by the individual citizen will only allow our politicians to persist longer in their folly, and will lead – quite soon – to even worse shortages of water, plus many other environmental disasters.”*

It seems to me that population growth is a large problem that Australia should be facing now and not into the future when it may be too late. China has attempted to limit its population growth, and it is obvious that India, some part of Africa and South America would be far better off if they were to do the same. Surely, as the driest continent, Australia must look at this problem as well.