

SUGARLOAF INTERCONNECTOR; an irresponsible and misguided policy on water.

We are all acutely aware that the whole of Australia has experienced serious drought conditions for many years now. Whole catchments are stressed and the condition of the Murray/Darling catchment in particular, is an environmental, social and economic disaster of national significance. Without water, crops will fail; without water, stock will die; without water, life as we know it, can't exist. This is a time when we need strong, calm and inspired leadership from our Governments based on a real understanding of the fundamental elements of both the water cycle and the managements of catchments. Recent policy initiatives of the Victorian Government show little evidence of this understanding.

Part of the State Government's Plans for the future supply of water to Melbourne is to "modernise" the irrigation and other infrastructure in the Goulburn/Murray Region – Victoria's Food Bowl. This is a project estimated to cost the taxpayer \$2,000,000,000, (around \$500 per woman, man and child in Melbourne). For this cost it is estimated that some 225 gigolitre (GL) of water will be "saved". This "new water" will then be allocated 1/3 or 75 GL to Melbourne, 1/3 to food bowl irrigators, and 1/3 to the environment. The State Government believes this is a win, win, win situation; but it isn't really "new water" as they claim, it is water previously part of the Murray/Golburn catchment that was wastefully managed and inadequately monitored. They have pulled this water out of a conjurer's hat ; I think it could better be called **magic water**. It is water that rightfully belongs to the Murray/Darling system.

I am completely opposed to any plan that proposes to take water from the Murray/Darling catchment and pump it to Melbourne. Of course I appreciate the great problems Melbourne faces to secure its water supply into the future, but there are other solutions to these problems such as up-grading the water infrastructure in Melbourne; educating the community on water conservation; installation of house tanks; water recycling; and the more realistic pricing of water to both domestic and industrial customers. Melbourne water users simply have to change their attitude to water

If water can be "saved" in the Goulburn/Murray Region as proposed by the Government, then it must be used to help in the restoration of the Murray/Darling catchment which, as we all know, is stressed beyond belief.

So far I have outlined my fundamental objection to the State Government's policy of pumping "magic water" over the Main Divide to Melbourne. There is strong opposition to this policy from many communities north of the Divide and Minister Tim Holding has faced some very torrid meetings from local governments and many community groups ion the Goulburn catchment. So far no ground has been given, but the campaign is hotting up.

However, planning for the pipeline is well advanced and the communities of Dixons Creek, Steels Creek and Yarra Glen have genuine concerns about the details of the route the pipeline will follow. In this part of the system the pipe will be 1.3m in diameter and buried well below the surface. The Government's preferred alignment follows the line of the Melba Highway down from the Divide. In Dixons Creek it turns sharply west into Hunts Lane, following that alignment to the Steels Creek Valley, south down Steels Creek to Yarra Glen and then over the hill into Sugarloaf Reservoir. A

20m easement is required to accommodate the pipeline during construction, and this becomes a 10m easement in perpetuity. Another option includes a continuation of the pipe along the Melba Highway as far as Yarra Glen and then along Simmonds Street and Yarraview Road.

The Yarra Glen and District Township Group opposes both these suggested alignments and landholders in Steels Creek have established a group to oppose the use of private land for the pipeline.

To construct the pipeline along Hunts Lane and Steels Creek Road would involve the loss of between 8km and 12km of invaluable remnant vegetation. Two alternative workable options have been identified and supported by both the Township and Landholder groups as well as the Yarra Glen Chamber of Commerce. We have agreed that if this seriously flawed Interconnector project is to proceed, then the best option is that the pipe should follow the Melba Highway to its intersection with the Maroondah aqueduct, just 4.5km north of Yarra Glen and already owned by Melbourne Water, and from there to Sugarloaf. If there is some valid reason why this is not possible, then the other option is to use the Melba Highway as far as Gulf Road, a “2-chain” road with almost no remnant vegetation and an easy geology for construction.

As I write there are further discussions proposed between the consortium responsible for the planning and completion of the project, several community groups in the Yarra Glen District and the Shire of Yarra Ranges to find the least damaging alignment. Councillor Jeanette McRae has been very proactive in getting these discussions under way and we appreciate her involvement in this campaign.

Sadly, the Sugarloaf Interconnector water policy plan of the Victorian Government indicates to me a failure to understand the vital importance of water to the life and wellbeing of country communities and the environments in which they live. Why take water from a parched catchment with communities suffering water restrictions running at Level 4 or higher, to satisfy the needs of another community (metropolitan Melbourne) with restrictions at 3A?? The Sugarloaf Interconnector policy is both irresponsible and misguided. Vale the Murray/Darling Catchment.