



**Healesville Environment Watch Inc.**

P.O. Box 444 Healesville VIC 3777

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**HEALESVILLE ♦ CHUM CREEK ♦ YARRA GLEN ♦ BADGER CREEK ♦  
DIXONS CREEK ♦ STEELS CREEK ♦ TARRAWARRA**

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ABN: 67 253 515 594 ♦ Reg. No: A0018935T ♦ <http://hewi.friends.melbournewater.com.au>

The Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Environment,  
Communications and the Arts  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA  
ACT 2600

30<sup>th</sup> January 2009

Dear Senators,

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

This submission is made on behalf of Healesville Environment Watch, PO Box 444, Healesville, Vic 3777. HEWI is a non-government environment group representing the Rylie Ward in the Shire of Yarra Ranges.

The purpose of this submission is to advise the Inquiry that Healesville Environment Inc. strongly supports the purpose of the Bill.

Given that Australia is already the driest inhabited continent, it should be obvious that whenever water is removed from the environment for human purposes, whether for consumption, agriculture or industry, there is a moral imperative for that water to be used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Successive Victorian and federal governments have failed in their obligation to ensure that irrigation infrastructure was maintained and utilised up-to-date technology but the need to now make up for decades of neglect to modernise the Victorian Foodbowl is not an appropriate or adequate excuse to extract water not only from the Goulburn River but from the Goulburn-Murray system. The Food-bowl Modernisation Project is a scheme that should have been completed previously but wasn't. It is now the responsibility of government to carry out the project at its expense, without taking water, that the system can't afford to lose, to pay for it.

The Goulburn River is the major Victorian Tributary to the Murray and recent studies have shown it to be severely stressed owing to reduction in inflows, over-allocation of

extractions and changes in flow regime caused by management in response to human needs that have not been sensitive to the needs of the environment.

This week the Federal Minister for Water and Climate Change acknowledged that the heat wave affecting South-eastern Australia is consistent with climate change predictions (**Heatwave a sign of climate change: Wong , ABC News Online <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/01/29/2477433.htm>** ). It is now painfully clear that the planet is in the grip of a changing climate and as Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability pointed out in his “State of the Environment Report” (December 2008), Australia is more vulnerable than other developed countries. CSIRO projections for the Victorian Government have shown that inflows to the Goulburn catchment will be reduced by up to 35% in 20 years.

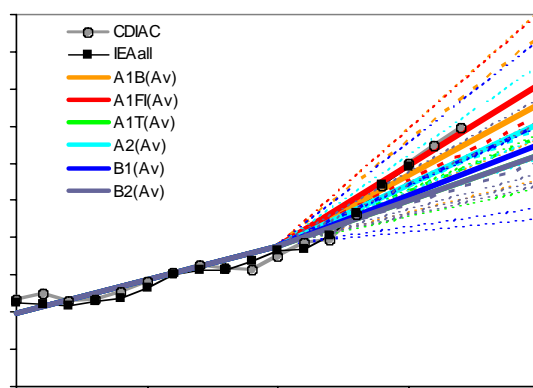
### **“water**

*Decreases in rainfall and higher evaporation rates will mean less soil moisture and less water for rivers. Our demand for water may also increase as a result of warmer temperatures and as our population grows. Therefore, our need to use water more efficiently will be even greater. Average annual runoff in the Goulburn and Broken rivers is expected to decrease by up to 35% by 2030. By 2070, runoff decreases to both rivers is expected to be between 5% and more than 50%.*

*Lower flows and higher temperatures may also reduce water quality within the catchment and create a more favourable environment for potentially harmful algal blooms. Greater bush fire activity could temporarily contaminate water catchments with sediments and ash. “*

Extract from *Climate Change in the Goulburn Broken*, one of a series of regional climate change profiles prepared by the CSIRO that are available online from [www.climatechange.vic.gov.au](http://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au)

Damaging though these projections may appear, the reality is likely to be even worse. The above projections are based on the IPCC’s Fourth Assessment Report, released in 2007. Current indications are that global atmospheric carbon dioxide levels are rising more rapidly than the IPCC’s A1F1 scenario, the most extreme emissions growth scenario considered in the report.



Actual Emissions vs IPCC Scenarios  
Raupach et al.  
2007 (updated), PNAS

In 2007, The Australian reported that we can expect climate change to deliver increased frequency and severity of bushfires (The Australian, **Extreme fire risk days ‘may**

**treble'**, September 27, 2007).

A more recent report has found that inflows to the Murray-Darling system will be further decreased by the increased uptake of water by the regrowth of forest following the 2003 Alpine bushfires (**Fires to cut Murray-Darling flows**, The Age, January 29, 2009).

Clearly there could not be a worse time to be investing in infrastructure with an expected operational lifetime of 100 years that is designed to extract 75 billion litres of water out of this already distressed system every year for human use outside the catchment.

Healesville Environment Watch Inc. calls on the Senate to adopt this Bill.

Sincerely,

Steve Meacher

Chairman

HEWI

Maureen Bond

Secretary

HEWI