

After listening to the proceedings before the Senate Inquiry on Wed 15th May I forward a copy of information which may help clarify the position with regard to the Water Act.

Irrespective of the outcome of the Inquiry it seems that this matter will inevitably proceed to the High Court for its opinion.

As I have pointed out over the years a feasibility study of the diversion of water from the Clarence River Basin to the Murray–Darling Basin is required. Let us find out firstly if there is water and electricity available, secondly a cost analysis both positive and negative and thirdly the environmental effect when compared with the problems of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Despite being ignored the Report (2008-2009) Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport says it all.

Below is a letter sent to Alan Jones on this matter

Ronald P Wilde

Re: The feasibility of Diverting Water from the Clarence Basin to the Murray- Darling Basin

Dear Alan

It appears that the Murray- Darling Basin Authority is overlooking the extensive enquiry (2008-2009) of the Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport. I received a copy of the Report which discusses the problem of the Murray- Darling Basin. It states that

9:10 the long term sustainable management of the Murray-Darling Basin presents significant challenges for the Australian Government and the government of the Basin States and Territories

9:11 the most critical challenge is the on-going scarcity of the water in the MBD.

Owing to the NO DAMS policy, supported by the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, my submission to the enquiry was the only proposal to increase the available water from the Clarence River. As reported in the Sydney Morning Herald “ the government has refused to reconsider its controversial Murray-Darling Basin water reform process despite the resignation of its chief water bureaucrat over the bitter dispute about the interpretation of the federal water laws.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority Chairman, Mike Taylor, resigned after receiving fresh legal advice from the Australian Government Solicitor confirming that the Water Act (2007) prevented him from “ compromising the minimum level of water required to restore the (river) system’s environment on social and economic grounds”.

This was what the Water Minister Tony Burke demanded Mr Taylor should do in a ministerial statement aimed at the preventing the collapse of the water reform process after furious rural reaction when the authority’s October draft plan said a minimum of 3000 gegalitres of water is needed to be returned to the environment flows. Mr Burke said that

there had been a “live question” as to whether the authority could “give equal weighting” to environmental, social and economic factors.

In his resignation statement Mr Taylor, who the Government believes seriously mishandled the release of the draft plan, called for the negotiation over the water rights to start straight away, rather than waiting for the authority to complete its process during 2011, leading to the increased community concerns and investment uncertainty.

According to the National Geographic Magazine (2002) the reach and benefits of dams are enormous. The worlds 45,000 large dams catch 14% of all precipitation runoff, provide water for up to 40% of irrigated land and give some 65 countries more than half their electricity.

The cancellation of the Wolfdene and Treveston Crossing Dams by Peter Garrett and Kevin Rudd reflects the No DAMS Policy as set out in correspondence with Mark Duffy, Director General, Department of Water and Energy NSW and Chris Schweizer, Assistant Secretary, Environment, Water and Natural Resources Branch.

There are five proposals investigating the feasibility of the Clarence River which has a constant flow unique to Australian Rivers. The Report by Rankine and Hill Pty Ltd was supervised and recommended by the Water Resources Commission of NSW. It was commenced by the Fraser Government on Australia Day 1983 only to be cancelled by the Hawke Government.

In 1985, Jack Beale (a former NSW Minister for Conservation and Environment) as Chairman of the Water Resources Foundation of Australia presented a proposal for a full investigation of the hydro-electric Scheme, which he described as a “sleeping giant of water, power and natural wealth”. This scheme could divert two million megalitres (four Sydney Harbours) annually to the MURRAY- DARLING BASIN.

Pump storage of 3000 megawatts could provide peak electrical load to NSW and Queensland.

The proposed ETS has emphasised the importance of the Snowy Mountains Electricity Commission which provides 74% of the renewable energy on the Eastern mainland and 24% nationally. This represents a displacement of more than 5 million tonnes of Green House gases that contribute to Global Warming each year. The NSW Government considered selling the asset but it caused such an uproar the offer was rescinded.

It appears that the MURRAY- DARLING BASIN Authority and Mr Burke have to decide whether the 3000 gicalitres of water is intended for the environment use or irrigation purposes.

As shown the feasibility study of the Clarence Basin-Murray Darling could be carried out in months. Never has so much information been available for the investigation. Once we know the benefits of this scheme we can satisfy both the environment and the irrigators

Kind regards

Ron Wilde
Retired Surveyor