

The following text are meeting notes from DELWP engagement at the GMW Loddon Valley Water Services Committee in Pyramid Hill on February 25, 2019.

The committee would like the notes prepared to be considered as their formal submission.

Endorsed by Committee Chairman, John Nelson

Notes

DELWP thanked the committee members for their time and provided a short outline of the Water Resource Plan and its purpose. Feedback on the Basin Plan and the water resource plan was provided as outlined below.

Committee noted that in light of Minister Burke's comments regarding buybacks there was a significant threat to Victoria – what is in the document about that? It was noted that the irrigation community has lost half our water and there is a belief that water obtained for environment under Basin Plan can't be delivered. The committee noted negative consequences with banks slumping such as the Goulburn system. The committee noted instances where the MDBA had run peak flows in the upper Goulburn in July which lead to bank slumping or scouring the bank.

Committee noted that they don't see Government owning up to stuff ups such as Menindee.

The committee noted that the document is not making any predictions or statements about where the water is going to end up. There is no discussion about what the impact is on communities. The Committee noted that there has been 15 years of significant change which hasn't been acknowledged. The community has suffered the brunt of the impact of Basin Plan. A lot of the resources in the community are gone.

Committee noted that transmission losses are decreasing the reliability of water. That in the area there used to be 100% security and now its something like 80% which impacts investment decisions. People don't want to invest in areas where water is losing reliability. "We are under extreme stress. We have federal government coming out to take more water and we are going to decimate the area."

The Committee believes that transformation projects are going to take out the work we have already done. We have meters in the area and some of the meters are not operational. Can costs \$400 to run batteries for the meters.

The Committee also noted that the document doesn't address these concerns and it has very little about irrigation in the GMID. There is a lot of repetition in the document. Want to have more involvement with Government to work through policy and strategy. Want the document to talk to what Government position is.

The Committee noted that very soon we will have 200GL removed from the consumptive pool. There was concern about the basis for the figures informing the savings and noted that it is another hit to our security. Irrigators have to pay for all of this and we aren't seeing any improvement for community. The Committee also noted about irrigators having trouble paying their water bills and there was nothing in the Plan that gives them a sense of optimism. "We want some security."

“There is no integrity about the Government is operating, none at all. This Plan is flawed and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan hasn't really delivered what it was promised to.”

“Victoria has been traditionally and still is a good water manager.”

Does this plan consider how irrigation and the environment complement each other? We are not in competition with each other. Noted that a dam is being filled and there was approximately 1000 ducks on the dam. “We are not trying to rip the heart out of our country” irrigators are passionate about protecting our environment. “There are plenty of tree planters in our district and in this room.” Trees are important for protecting our environment. It was noted that they get Ibis when they irrigate rather than at Kerang Lakes.”

“Irrigators are not interested in destroying our environment so our farm benefit we want them both to survive.”

How is recreation dealt with in the Plan? Recreational use is highlighted in the document. If recreational users want access to water they need to own water. What commitment is in the Plan around meeting recreational water requirements?

Recreational water use affects our security in the system. Note proposal to set minimum levels in Lake Eppalock which can substantially affect water security of entitlement holders.

Committee noted that there is a misconception in the urban centres about who owns the water in dams. It is important to try and educate local government and urban customers the reality of who owns and controls the water.

Concern was raised about boats and jet ski on these water bodies, noting they do a lot of damage to the banks and its affecting the water quality. Would like to see the boats and jet skis banned.

Committee noted support of Minister Neville. We think she is doing a great job. “If we don't see changes we are not going to survive. We need to see action.”

Committee asked what if Minister Neville moves on or is prevented from delivering on her promises somehow.

It was noted that the Melbourne urban water corporations are planning for a dryer future.

The basis for the figures identified in the Basin Plan was discussed. DELWP noted that the Long Term Water Resource Assessment was coming up which would look at availability in the Victorian system. Also noted that the risk assessment pulled in the risks of climate change.

My family has been collecting rain data for the last 100 years, we see rain patterns that run every 30-40 years. We have to plan for dry and wet. Committee noted they get a monthly statement identifying water availability. “We are down to 879GL from 1648GL and every year since the introduction of unbundling we have lost water and it has been dramatic and it has been far more impactful than climate change for us.”

“Stability of this area is key”. Committee noted that irrigators are paying for something and never

get any benefits. Noted that 11 dairy farms have closed down and there is more to follow.

DELWP discussed the review of the northern Sustainable Water Strategy that is commencing this year. This will be a policy document that will set the strategic direction for northern Victoria.

All of that is irrelevant if this district fails.

“We have been losing water for 12 years. Nothing has been done to mitigate the impact on our community. We are on a fine line. If something isn't done soon we might lose this irrigation community. If we don't do something soon we won't be able to use the water we do have.”

DELWP noted that the WRP identifies what strategies and tools we have in our framework to deliver on Basin Plan and that we are confident in our framework to deliver on Basin Plan.

Noted that they hear that GMW doesn't care where the water goes and if it moves from area to area. Might be the case for a bureaucrat but it means a lot to us. We are now at risk of losing water to interstate buyers and that's disappointing. It does affect communities and we should be looking at it.

Need to be clear that there are clear risks to the security of Victoria's water entitlements but its not stated.

John Nelson (Chair)

on behalf of the Loddon Valley Water Services Committee