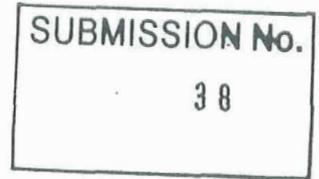




Executive Officer
Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002



Dear Sir,

I realize that the enclosed document on the proposed Murray-Goulburn pipeline should have been submitted by the 21st August but, for reasons beyond my control, I could not post it in time. I do hope that my brief comments on this issue can be included in the considerations as this is a subject about which I have considerable concern.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia Phair".

Dr Pat Phair

THE SUGARLOAF PIPELINE

August 2008

Dr Pat Phair

Australia has the lowest average rainfall of any inhabited continent and sustainable use of water is an issue to which we must pay close attention. Rainfall runoff has decreased by 41% over the last decade in the Murray-Goulburn district and CSIRO predicts that, as a result of climate change, this trend is likely to continue. At the same time population growth and an increasingly extravagant lifestyle have put increasing pressure on Melbourne's water supplies and it is estimated that urban water use has doubled in the past 20 years. Thus, in order to satisfy what is perceived to be an urgent need to boost Melbourne's water, one proposal by the State Government is to pipe some of the water saved through improved irrigation technology in the Murray Goulburn district into Melbourne's Sugarloaf reservoir. However, it is important to consider whether there is a simpler solution to the potential shortfall in Melbourne's water supplies and what is the likely impact of this massive relocation of water on the environment and on the productivity of the region.

The Murray-Goulburn district is considered to be the "Food Bowl of Victoria", and is responsible for a large proportion of the \$9 billion generated by irrigated irrigation each year. However, it has been badly affected by drought for several years, the Goulburn River is perilously low, and the Eildon reservoir contains only 15% of its total capacity. As a result there is less water available for irrigation and, coupled with the reduced rainfall in the area, this has had a devastating impact on the local farmers and their livelihood.

It has been estimated that, in "average" years, about 900 GL / year of water are lost in the Murray Goulburn area, due to evaporation, leaky pipes and other problems associated with the antiquated irrigation system – approximately twice Melbourne's current annual water use.. Whilst the proposed upgrade of the irrigation system is urgently needed and will certainly help improve the farmer's situation, the total savings in water is expected to be considerably less than the estimated 450 GL/year, which was based on average rainfall data, not the current figure. If 75GL are piped off to Melbourne and possibly 200GL taken to improve the health of the river downstream, there may be little left for the farmers' desperate needs.

Melbourne has several alternatives for boosting its water supplies, including the harvesting of storm-water, (most of which simply flows into the sea at present), installation of domestic water tanks, increased recycling of domestic grey water for reuse in the garden and recycling of sewerage to a level suitable for drinking. In contrast, the irrigators need water to ensure they can continue to produce food both for the domestic market and for the rest of the world – an increasingly important item as global food production shrinks and the world's population grows.. Finally the Murray and the Goulburn rivers desperately need water to their survival as regular replenishment with the run-off from rainfall fades away.

In conclusion, installation of a pipeline costing the community \$750 million to remove water from an area in great need of that resource to one of considerable affluence is totally unjustifiable

Patricia Phair