

The Hon. John Brumby, MLA, Premier of Victoria
The Parliament of Victoria
1 Treasury Place
Victoria 3000

Attachment 1

6 August 2007

Dear Premier,

I write regarding the proposed desalination plant and the north-south pipeline. At this stage, you have no democratic mandate to proceed with these proposals. I urge you, therefore, to hold a referendum to allow Victorians to decide whether they are the most appropriate means of securing Melbourne's future water supply.

The idea of a desalination plant was first raised last year by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Ted Baillieu, at which time it was vigorously rejected by the Bracks government. On the day that the Victorian Labor Party launched its November 2006 election campaign, the then premier described the desalination idea as a 'hoax'. He stated that the energy generation required for desalination is 'enormous', and that the 'intrusion on the community is enormous, and, of course, it is extraordinarily expensive'. He argued, instead, that water recycling and water conservation measures would be sufficient to achieve water security for Melbourne.

At the time of the November election, your government did not take any policy initiatives regarding these infrastructure projects to the people of Victoria. Yet, in less than a year, and with the next election more than three years away, your government now proposes these massive infrastructure projects. This has occurred without any public consultation, without the opportunity for public debate, without an examination of environmental effects or assessment of health and water quality issues, and without proper scrutiny from an independent authority on the costs and benefits of the schemes or the financial arrangements for them.

What is the background against which you propose to implement these infrastructure projects? We are at a critical juncture with respect to water use, water management and achieving our future water security. We are an affluent, high water-use country, with the largest domestic water footprint of any nation on Earth. We let many opportunities to conserve water go begging. The volume of urban stormwater runoff from our cities in an average year, for instance, is only slightly less than the total volume of water consumed by households. And, every day, millions of litres of water that could be recycled are carried away from homes, businesses, factories and farms and simply discharged into the sea. Our industries are not yet required to even audit their water use. We have not adequately invested, either, in our irrigation industries to overcome significant water-loss problems or to achieve other water efficiencies. Nor have we invested sufficiently in the repair and maintenance of our seriously degraded freshwater ecosystems.

Our current problems with water can be turned around by embracing efficiency across all sectors of the Victorian community – in our households, industries and on our farms. Irrespective of the future impacts of climate change upon our water resources, our best chance of achieving a sustainable water future lies with us becoming super-efficient water users living within our existing water means.