

SUBMISSION No.

101

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ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL
RESOURCES COMMITTEE

22nd September 2008

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA.
ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCE COMMITTEE**

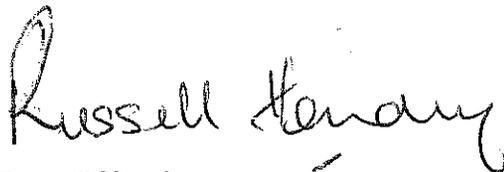
Parliament House, Spring St
East Melbourne

Re Inquiry into Melbourne's future Water Supply

Dear members of the Committee,

I apologise for the lateness of this submission however I have had it prepared for some time and been reluctant to forward it to you. I do not have any political, financial or vested interest in this. I am a retired engineer who managed waste resources for 30 years and diverted hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste from landfill annually. I see synergy in what I did and the opportunities available in the water industry. This may lead nowhere, however I am available for comment should you take the time to read this.

Yours sincerely



Russell Hendry

Water management Statewide and irrigation in the Bacchus Marsh Region

Huge volumes of water are wasted because of poor water management by Government authorities. The number of Government authorities that "control" water leads to lack of responsibility and the ability to shift blame, costs and inefficient management methods.

To detail this let me give an example of this mismanagement in my area (no doubt this occurs Statewide).

- Treated water for domestic purposes comes under the control of Western Water. This includes the supply to residents and the treatment of wastewater (sewerage plants).
- The irrigation water is controlled by Southern Rural water and their attempt to supply water to irrigators in our district, which happens to be a major food producing area, is a disaster with huge impacts on employment, community development and wealth in the area.
- Melbourne Water controls Stormwater.

Water is categorised by who controls it, ie Western water, SRW, Melbourne Water. This is wrong. We need to develop a "hierarchy of water" policy and give management of TOTAL water to a controlling body. This hierarchy would be rated according to water importance and clear policy and guidelines developed to let users know where they stand. Obviously the first priority would be domestic use however the second tier would be food production and this could be further defined to include agriculture and types, food production/manufacturing etc. Tough decisions are needed as to where water use fits. We need to debate this with the aim to raise all water use to the highest possible tier in the hierarchy.

Once established, the single body should have "cradle to grave" management of the resource, eg If an industrial operation requires 300megalitres per annum then this operation would be required to submit a water management plan indication recycling plans and effluent discharges. The recycled water and effluent remain the property of the single body for distribution to other users (irrigators?). The industry would be required to install return infrastructure if necessary to satisfy requirements.

The bigger picture, which would require Federal Government control would be to allocate irrigation areas throughout Australia and reduce the food bowl areas to those with sufficient guaranteed water – Ord river? As the weather patterns shift you cannot expect traditional areas to continue just because of lifestyle or infrastructure if they do not have the resource available. A tough decision but at least certainty prevails and these traditional growers don't die a slow death – they are compensated now and can move to other areas or convert to other business.

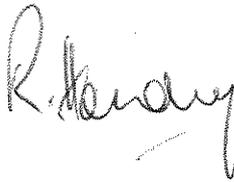
In Bacchus Marsh we have a large vegetable and fruit growing area that has suffered at the hands of residential development over the last 20 years – not the current drought. Poor planning decisions and lack of long term planning have meant these producers no longer have water to produce. This has led to rationing of water by SRW to such a point that large producers like Tripod farmers moved to Swan Hill chasing water until it ran out and have now moved to Maffra in Gippsland in pursuit of water. This will happen to others as allocations have reduced production to uneconomic levels. Adding to this dilemma is the huge amounts of time and resources local Councils waste supporting growers with grandiose schemes and

approaches to parliamentarians to rectify this irreconcilable problem. Schemes such as proposals to bring a pipeline some 100 kilometres with treated water with a finite quantity and dubious quality. These flawed infrastructure models are based on hope and short-term benefits to those proposing them – not on reality.

On a local level it is possible for some growers to survive if others reduce the demand by departing the industry – but which ones? Who makes the decision? It is a lifestyle to these growers BUT we have seen the apple production in the area decrease dramatically and this is slowly happening to vegetable growers.

The water wasted through the three tiered management system and lack of a Hierarchy means poor and inefficient use of water. Five hundred megalitres from Western Water treatment plant goes to lowly rated re-use while a further 300 megalitres goes off in evaporation. This could be re-used in food bowl or even residential use. This quantity could reach 1 gigalitre of water annually if properly managed. The quality exceeds that of Werribee treatment farms as the waste is mainly from residences and does not have high levels of salts and heavy metals. Infrastructure costs to pipe this to the irrigators would be low and recovered quickly based on current water prices. It represents a bonanza for the district however it will be red tape and bureaucratic bungling that will never let this occur and lead to the demise of the foodbowl area in Bacchus Marsh.

Russell Hendry
September 2008

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Hendry', with a horizontal line underneath the name.