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Review of the Operation of the Cap
Murray-Darling Basin Commission
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DATE 2 JULY 2000

Dear Tony,

Thank you for the copies of the Draft Report on Review of the Operation of the Cap. In the hectic times in which we work on the land these days it has taken me some time to digest the whole report. It is none the less very interesting reading. I would like to make some comments on the equity section to which I first made a submission, but could I briefly make a comment on the ecological sustainability of Rivers section.

Can I start by saying that I was born in Gunnedah in 1935 and have lived all my life within a few kilometres of the NAMOI River at CARROLL. As kids we grew up in a world without TV and countless hours of our lives were spent on or in the river. We swam or fished practically every day of each week in the warmer months and fished on many afternoons of the colder months. In my younger years the River seemed to be more often a chain of water holes than a regularly flowing stream. We knew the depth and size of all the larger water holes and practically every submerged log within a few kilometres of the village of Carroll. The construction of Keepit Dam played a large part in the history of Carroll, providing a work place for many of the residents of the village. When in the latter 1950's the dam was completed, the River changed, in that we now had a stream which flowed in all but the very dry seasons and flowed at a height that was consistently higher than was the case previously. However it was still a fairly pristine River, we swam and fished with much contentment until the arrival of the European Carp. I believe this event has been the singular most significant influence on the health of the River I had come to love so much. We no longer had clear sparkling water, but rather a turbid murky River in which you were lucky if when fishing to catch any Bream, Yellowbelly, Cod or Catfish, which had been staple diet all those years before.

The reason for making these comments, relates to the statement on page 45 of the report, sect 5.2.4.4 Pest Species where it states, "It is rarely possible to separate the ecological impacts of alien species from the impacts of catchment management and alterations

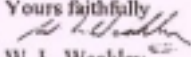
in flow pattern and volume". The statement is obviously correct, but I believe there is a section of the Namoi River from the point where the Peel River joins the Namoi River to a point approximately halfway between Carroll and Gunnedah, where very little has changed in the last 50 years, other than the operation of Keepit Dam, which for many years did not show detrimental affects to the health of the River. In the section of River referred to there is no large scale irrigation development adjacent to the river and no re-entry of tailwater to the stream. The irrigation close to the river is of lucerne or pasture, similar to that which has been occurring since early in the 19th century. Similarly, whilst irrigation development in the Peel River valley has increased, the nature of the enterprises has changed very little over this time, so that water entering the Namoi does not bring a burden of contamination. Notwithstanding the proximity to Keepit Dam and the regular flushing this section of the river receives, the apparent health of the river is no better than where the river further west winds its way through the intensely irrigated valley. If the deterioration, of this section of the River is not due to the carp then I would be interested to see the cause of the problem identified. I hear people talk of collapsing river banks due to changed river flows. Whilst changed river flows are one factor, I can show you where my grandfather and his brothers felled giant river gum trees, with a cross cut saw, adjacent to the Namoi River following the 1864 flood to try and prevent river bank erosion. They tied these trees with wire rope cable to the stump and there they stayed for over 100 years. When I went to photograph them recently the logs had all but rotted away. I don't know whether the effort would be considered successful by to-days standards, the point being landowners have been trying to prevent erosion of their river banks for over 100 years.

Comments on Equity Section of draft report.

I would gather from reading this section of the report that the submission I made, together with others has been directed to the State Government for consideration. Can I make some effort to express my frustration and I know frustration of others in this position. For some years we have been trying to have the State Government consider the equity of our situation, to be told on each occasion that they, the State, could do nothing to alter the agreement made at Murray Darling Basin level. Here we thought was the first opportunity at a review to have our concerns raised and lo and behold we are told it is the States jurisdiction. In the groundwater zone in which our property is situated we are expected to cope with cuts of 77% of our current allocation. This zone's irrigation history shows that as far back as 1985 we had the area developed to use in excess of the estimated sustainable yield of the aquifer. Certainly by 1994 the developed area was in place to use 90% of the allocation. In a climate where we are told of the losses of hundreds of thousands of megalitres of water in "unnecessary" evaporation from the Menindee Lakes system and no one seems to give a damn, (excuse the pun), many of us have problems with the equity of a system that says we can't receive access to alternate water sources of some 40000 megs in order to remain viable. Interestingly, the issue we raised of consideration of some overland flows for substitution of groundwater, (some of which has been harvested for years and is subject to the NSW government's amnesty considerations) the Draft Review shows concern, but not for our situation, rather for inclusion in the current Cap! It seems to be easier to see fairness in the current system if one is not financially dependent on groundwater resources in our area.

Thank you for the opportunity to express these concerns, I look forward to the final report with considerable interest.

Yours faithfully


W. L. Wenkley.