

FOARDS FREEHOLDS PTY LTD

11 April 2007

Hon Peter McGauran

Dear Sir

There is a hidden problem with the Latrobe Aquifer in Gippsland.

We are long established farmers with two properties just east of Bairnsdale and we are writing to you both as our local Federal member and Minister for Agriculture. Previously in October 2004 we wrote and expressed our concern about the falling levels and pressure in the Latrobe Aquifer. You referred then to the CSIRO report Falling Water Levels in the Latrobe Aquifer, this acknowledges our problem. Further we understand there are other reports confirming the seriousness of the situation.

Recently a request from East Gippsland Water for the possible sale of water from our bore has raised doubt in our minds as to future sustainability of our supply. Since we last wrote to you there has been no feedback or consultation from the Sustainable Groundwater Project or any other government department either State or Federal. As a consequence we told East Gippsland Water there was no certainty of supply.

We are disadvantaged and at risk in the following areas

- Our considerable expenditure on bore, piping and distribution plant
- Loss of water security resulting in future planning problems
- Any possible future sale of water for either municipal or trade use

The viability of our farming enterprise relies on irrigation water from a deep bore drilled in 1973. For many years the bore was free flowing and our pump was designed for this. After a massive fall in pressure and a static water level fall of 33 meters from the bore, in 2003 we were forced to install a fully submersible pump costing \$50000. For many months before installation and during the long process our water supply and our production were severely curtailed.

The newly installed pump system has been designed to fit our bore, which does have a constriction at the 84ft level. Further falls in groundwater will make our bore inoperable and it would have to be fully replaced, at a minimum cost of \$400,000. This would be too great a cost for us to bear. All the costs of drilling and maintaining the groundwater bore to date have been fully ours and in today's terms would be at least \$280,000. Now our concern is further vindicated because the decline and subsidence of water levels continues. In our bore, the static water level has fallen three meters in three years. The static water level accurately measured when our pump was withdrawn for service during July 2006

We understand a component of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Project will be the

- investigation and assessment of the Latrobe Aquifer in Gippsland, information will be provided on the impact on Yarram irrigators and on financial assistance for them

Although we are not Yarram irrigators we have the same problem and are drawing from the same aquifer and must be included with them in all initiatives including assistance, advice and compensation. I wrote to you prior to the 2004 election pointing out our bore concerns. We have had no advice or feedback.

The priority for us is our continued supply of water from the Latrobe aquifer bore in the long term.

This problem has been getting worse for thirty years there is plenty of evidence and we will provide our experience if required. No one is taking the side of the small users of the aquifer. This is not a drought problem it is a poor management problem and no one is helping us. It is time for both the Federal and State governments take some responsibility.

There are increasing numbers of exploration and commercial oil and gas companies in Bass Strait withdrawing water as part of their operations. In environment impact statements some even claim 'all they release into the ocean is artesian water.' This has been a key reason for the problem. One possible solution is that oil and gas companies withdrawing from the aquifer should be required to recharge. This is the procedure in many places overseas. Are Gippslanders going to suffer the same problems as occurs in USA near gas and oil fields?

This matter is serious and causing us anxiety and we feel it is unfair that we should be losing such a wonderful resource if it is being wasted in Bass Strait or the Latrobe coal mines.

Could you take up this matter on behalf of the smaller Gippsland users of this groundwater?

Please advise us on progress as soon as possible

Gloria Foard

Foards Freeholds Pty Ltd