Dear Secretary,

RE: TERMS OF REFERENCE - INQUIRY INTO RURAL DRAINAGE IN VICTORIA [10 OCTOBER 2012]

INTRODUCTION

I have been a member of Victorian Local Government for over 20 years: firstly as a councillor with the Shire of Rutherglen and then, from the formation of Indigo Shire, a councillor until 26 October 2012. During my time with Indigo Shire I was Mayor on seven [7] occasions.

I did not nominate for the 2012 Local Government elections.

I submit the following for consideration by your committee in regard to the Inquiry into Rural Drainage in Victoria.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

ITEM 1: HISTORY

During my time as a councillor with Rutherglen Shire the drainage of the area was controlled by the BLACK DOG CREEK Committee of Management.

Generally within the area WEST of Chiltern Iron Bark Forest - all streams flow from EAST or SOUTH to the NORTH and empty eventually into the Murray River of the Ovens River.

The drains, running from Black Dog Creek, Murdering Hut Creek and many smaller streams coped with high rainfall and it was very rare for agricultural lands EAST of Rutherglen and astride the Murray Valley Highway to be inundated.

Many intermittent streams can be found within the area, generally bounded by:
The Hume Freeway to the SOUTH - The Ovens River to the NORTH - The Murray River to the EAST and Boundary Road to the WEST.

During the time the Black Dog Creek Committee of Management was in operation flooding occurred in the Chiltern township and from the Black Dog Creek across the Wangaratta-Corowa Road.

Generally flooding did not, in my memory, take place in the Rutherglen township although some local flooding occurred in Wahgunyah and low lying areas of the Rutherglen township.

The roadside drains were well maintained by VicRoads, the Shire and the Black Dog Creek Committee and flooding was kept to a minimum.

**ITEM 2; STATUS**

Eastern Australia has just recovered from a ten [10] year drought.

Lack of rain and the fact that the road surfaces lasted much longer and retained their good condition due to a lack of water damage saw, in my view, a lessening of maintenance by all levels of management [State, Local and Management Committees] in maintaining and clearing drains, roadside table drains, both local and main roads, and the prolific infestation of weeds and grasses into drainage channels, creeks and rivers.

Coupled with those problems was the removal of local drainage committees and the over-all control vested in Catchment Management Authorities.

I feel that the change of supervision from local committees, comprising local people who had a collective knowledge of drainage issues in their localities, was an ill conceived re-organisation.

**ITEM, 3; BENEFITS OF RURAL DRAINAGE**

Effective drainage ensures agricultural and pastoral lands are not lost or denied to production for periods of time due to inundation. There are benefits in the protection of sealed and gravel roads, culverts and bridges also.

The general area around Rutherglen is relatively flat and once water escapes, or is prevented from entering drainage assets, it will "lay" over the land making it unusable for considerable time and preventing agricultural recovery.

During the early part of 2012 the Murray Valley Highway from Rutherglen township EAST to the Great Northern/Faulkiners Road intersection and huge amounts of the GOORAMADDA locality were underwater and impassable for days.

In my 25 years in this district I cannot remember any similar circumstances or the total area which was flooded to such an extent nor any such problem which lingered for over 10 days.

**ITEM 4; IMPACTS OF RURAL DRAINAGE**

Poor drainage interferes with roads, fencing, bridges, culverts, agricultural production and neighbours.

It is important, in my view, that changes to drainage take into account changes in the
speed that high volumes of water are delivered down stream.

Drains, creeks and rivers obstructed by reeds, grasses, rubbish and fouling can, I believe, cause water to "back-up " and inundate flat land due to the impediment, by such obstacles, to the flow of water.

I have conducted a physical inspection of drainage assets around Great Southern/Chiltern Roads and Police Paddocks and Gooramadda Roads and, in my view, these assets are:

a. poorly maintained with water-ways obstructed by weeds and grasses,
b. water courses seem to have had their natural course altered thereby causing inundation problems to areas not previously affected, and
c. many culverts seem to NOT be aligned with the water flow causing water to move past the culverts as the entry points are often at right angles to the flow of water, particularly so in:

   Great Southern/Cornishtown/Chiltern Roads areas,
   Police Paddocks/Gooramadda Roads intersection, and
   at the Murray Valley Highway/Gills Road/Great Northern Road junction.

At all of those locations major culverts/bridges have been installed however they are not, in my view, positioned to allow water to flow quickly through to the Murray River.

The lack of alignment causes water to eddy around the assets, undermining them and causing damage to them and forcing water to "back-up" and inundate farming land, local facilities, highways and roads.

**ITEM 5; OPTIONS**

The following options are put forward for consideration by the enquiry:

a. Improved and regular maintenance of drains, creeks and rivers to remove impediments to water flow,
b. Inspection of culverts to ensure water approaches are at such an angle that water will flow through the drainage assets,
c. "Flood Gates" be a requirement to be fitted to fences that cross drainage assets, creeks etc.,
d. Flotsam, grass etc be removed from gates/fences to ensure full flow of water,
e. Local knowledge be encouraged into area drainage organisations[CMAs'], Local Councils/Shires and VicRoads to ensure that historical factors are not "lost", and
f. Private property owners/users do not carry out unhauthorised works that may improve drainage to their property but cause substantial damage and inconvenience to others.

**CONCLUSION**
Drought, lack of regular maintenance, unauthorised works on private property, changes in water flow along waterways and overgrown waterways all play a part, in my view, in exacerbating flooding and inundation etc. in heavy rain periods.

The loss of production, financial costs to repair assets and disruption to the wider community are all factors which need to be taken into account when considering resourcing drainage, particularly in rural areas.

I look forward to receiving a copy of the recommendations from this enquiry.

Yours sincerely

Peter Graham OAM
Mayor Emeritus

17 December 2012