



24.8.17

The Executive Officer
Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002
enrrdc@parliament.vic.gov.au

Re: Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development in relation to the management, governance, and use of environment water.

To Whom It May Concern

Friends of Lake Wallace (FLW) are writing to provide a submission. In particular we are writing in response to the Terms of Reference items 2-4, as we are not located along the river Murray.

2. **The need for balance between irrigation requirements and the environment generally.**
 - a. **The existing governmental structures in Victoria contain a built-in bias towards irrigation, as reflected in the priorities of GWMWater. The environmental features that depend on water sustain much of the natural habitat which in turn sustains human populations and their critical every-day needs. We would like to see a better balance in users, with the needs of the environment protected.**
 - b. **The current environmental watering program does not provide watering from groundwater systems where irrigation is surrounded by wetlands that could benefit from such programs. E.g. Lake Charlegrark in Western Victoria is a very important wetland, both from Indigenous Cultural Values, modern social amenity, environmental values for waterbirds and wildlife. Climate change has affected the region, and there are likely effects on the waterways from the groundwater extractions. We believe there should be research as to whether areas where there are high volumes extracted for irrigation should have a preserved amount for waterways as well, including wetlands that need watering from this groundwater, not just from surface waters.**

3. **Barriers to more efficient use of environmental water and how these may be addressed.**
 - a. **Our group is located in the West Wimmera region of Victoria. We have no surface water irrigation capacity. The only irrigation is via groundwater pumping. Due to the costs involved, at this time no government authority is willing to pump groundwater to supplement environmental flows. Therefore, it is essential that our region is connected to a piped network to allow environmental watering to occur. Efficient delivery to wetlands affected by climate change, altered water regimes and extractions can involve pipes directly to the high priority point. For instance, although Environmental Flows**



are let out of Rocklands for the Glenelg River, there are a number of points e.g. at Harrow, that are more efficient locations for delivery. Directing the water via pipe directly to this site saves water, efficiency and provides multiple benefits to the community.

- b. **When considering lakes and water features their proximity to population affects their importance.** If a lake is central to a town's environment the absence of water and its sustainability, no matter how temporary, will adversely affect that town's morale, wellbeing and commercial viability. Because of climate change, changes in land contouring and land use, a major water feature, such as a critical lake that has for a century or more been considered both permanent and integral to a town's environment, should be supported by an irrigation structure that would ensure its viability for all community purposes at all times.
- c. **In light of changed environmental values over time, there should be opportunity for regular research and review about the location and volume for environmental watering.** For instance, there is a greater focus on indigenous cultural watering than there was a decade ago. Based on the use and type of waterway important to indigenous people and in preserving signs of their culture, this affects waterways and their values. A similar argument can be made for social values based on current populations. For instance, while not every waterway can be watered, those where a local population can also attract tourists, protect the surrounding environment, and showcase a casestudy of the local region should be considered e.g. Lake Wallace in Edenhope, as the multiple benefits are hugely apparent, and it also serves to keep tourists away from some other wetlands.
- d. **Determining effects of environmental watering should look at environmental, economic and social effects.** For instance, does the project protect endangered species, migratory birds, water supplies, town amenities, health, viability of rural communities? Trials of the effects of different types of environmental watering may find that multiple beneficiaries can be achieved at some sites previously excluded. E.g. town wetlands.

4. Assessment of fees and charges.

- a. **While efficiency and cost are obvious considerations the intangible effects of decisions and non-decisions on towns, farms, flora and fauna are transcending considerations and should not be lightly dismissed at any stage.** Transparency in decision-making and on factual issues is an imperative for good governance. In terms of costs, it must be recognized that the public expect more from their water resources than just the support of agricultural production. Rural communities have high expectations of amenity considerations.
- b. **It is unfair that water is not reserved for their town wetlands, and that irrigators can operate without an allocation of environmental water in their communities.** The pricing should be borne by the beneficiaries, which include



irrigators who have licences to earn money from their water, and from the general public who benefit from the environmental protection. We believe the protection of environmental water supplies is similar to the protection of National Parks and reserves, it is something everyone contributes to. A single community should not bear the brunt of watering costs, unless they wish it added on the competitive water market.

- c. **We believe the benefits of water availability are not well costed in cost:benefit assessments.** The benefits of irrigation are readily captured and appear to drive determination of where water should go and limits the amount left for the environment. More work must be done to ensure the costs to environmental users is offset against benefits including maintenance of international treaties for waterbirds, social and mental health of populations, the cost of rural community decline, tourism and loss or deterioration of threatened species and communities.

5. **Management, governance and Use**

- a. **Governance - It is incumbent on those who make decisions affecting the water needs of towns and localities that interested parties fully participate in a mandatory consultative process before decisions are taken.** Consultative Committees set up for the purpose must be representative of the respective interests without imbalance and in accordance with the defined processes preceding their formation. Fait accomplis are not a good look in these times.
- b. **As for management, all of the above is relevant.**
- c. Consultations between regional water authorities and the CEO's of Shire Council should be fully disclosed to all Shire Councillors. There is no justification for secrecy as these do not engage national security.
- d. **Review of use patterns must occur to ensure there is an equitable, sustainable balance between the needs of towns, stock & domestic supplies, irrigators and the environment.** At this point, the arguments of irrigators appear louder than other groups, and we believe balance must be made to the system to ensure the next generation do not suffer.
- e. **Better community education and engagement about the benefits of environmental watering must be a priority.** Engaging the public in appreciating the long term benefits of watering will gain more advocates for differential management and charges. This is best achieved by continued investment in best practice for watering, and listening to consumers. For instance, many communities believe their local environmental watering is not being done to maximise benefits, either to the waterway or the communities that are connected to them. A two-way dialogue is essential.

6. **Finally, one has to ask what is the connection and inter-face between this Parl inquiry on the environment and the Wimmera Mallee Water Resource Plan?**

- a. Is the former second guessing the latter?



- b. Where does duplication begin and end?

Friends of Lake Wallace – our Statement of Purpose

- 1. To pass on Edenhope's environment to the next generation in a healthier state than the way we find it today.*
- 2. To do something practical about protecting and restoring Edenhope's unique environment, contributing to the health, wealth and wellbeing of our community.*
- 3. To undertake sustainability education and awareness raising initiatives.*

Friends of Lake Wallace – our Terms of Reference

- 1. To pursue urgently, all available means of restoring the viability of Lake Wallace as Edenhope's centrepiece, its major recreational facility, its importance for mental health, sport and tourism and in particular, secure against drought the town's future environmental water supply.*

ANDREW FARRAN,

President,
for and on behalf of the
Friends of Lake Wallace

