

OUR REF:JT4431/Sub-82

22 August 2019

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
4 Harvest Tce
WEST PERTH WA 6005



Dear Chair

I write on behalf of many Manjimup constituents in my electorate who are experiencing significant tension and division within their community regarding water allocation.

While the Southern Forests Irrigation Scheme (SFIS) is referenced in much of the public commentary, the core issue is the availability of water license to many in the West Manjimup area, which, according to the Department of Water (DoW), is fully allocated. The strongly held belief in the west Manjimup area is that the SFIS is competing for their water.

Many farmers believe the SFIS is taking water licenses that could otherwise be made available to surface water users in the west Manjimup area, including Dixvale and Yanmah Brooks.

Adding to the confusion, there are mixed messages originating from the DoW, including inconsistency with the application of principles like "Spring Rights".

Farmers, in the interests of the future productivity of their farms, need assurances about water allocation and a clear understanding of the position of Government to remain confident about their farming business enterprise into the future.

The current situation is pitting farmer against farmer, and straining strong historical friendships.

The Hon Diane Evers has been active in this space, meeting locals who want to stop the damming of the Donnelly River for environmental reasons. She has petitioned Parliament calling for the SFIS to be stopped. Many in the west Manjimup area would see this outcome as being in their interest for the reasons outlined above.

I believe there is a strong argument for a Parliamentary inquiry into surface water management issues as it applies to the Manjimup region, however, it would clearly have broader benefit in informing us as to the effectiveness of other surface water management systems in Western Australia.

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The inquiry should investigate, but not be limited to:-

1. Quality assurance of existing and established water allocation methodology, including peer review of same;
2. Confidence in the prediction and calibration of prediction methods of water allocation;
3. Do existing definitions need to be updated (eg Spring rights);
4. What mechanisms are in place to ensure stakeholder and public engagement and do they work effectively. Is the department adequately resourced to do this effectively;
5. Are we properly valuing the competing interest for a limited resource, including scope for environmental offsets;
6. What is the current alignment with the National Water Initiative (which WA is a signatory to) and what needs to take place to further progress towards this alignment.

As you would be aware, the Minister for Water announced in August last year he was embarking on a water legislative reform process, which I am sure will have a robust community and industry engagement process. It remains unclear as to the timeline for this process.

However, whilst I recognise it would be inappropriate to engage in any sort of Parliamentary inquiry while Government is embarking on industry consultation for legislative reform, a Parliamentary inquiry would add value to this discussion. It is something that would add value to the Government's water reform agenda, but also offer Manjimup surface water users the opportunity to feed in their views.

Therefore, I respectfully seek the Committee's earnest consideration of an inquiry into water issues in the Manjimup region.

Yours sincerely



Terry Redman MLA
MEMBER FOR WARREN-BLACKWOOD