



VALLEY WATCH Inc.

ABN 68 541 154 062

P.O. Box 637, YAMBA 2464

November 13, 2010

Mr Tony Windsor MP
Box 6022,
Parliament House,
Canberra A.C.T. 2600.

Dear Mr Windsor,

Submission: Standing Committee on Regional Australia

Valley Watch Inc. is a community organisation based in the Lower Clarence Valley on the banks of the Clarence River. Our mission statement is "to advocate for a healthy and biologically diverse environment and preserve the quality of life of the Clarence Valley".

Persistent reports in the local and regional media strongly suggest that the Standing Committee on Regional Australia will consider Clarence River water diversion, even though the official terms of reference of the committee do not, we understand, indicate that interbasin water transfer will be under consideration.

Should that be the case, Valley Watch expresses its absolute opposition to any diversion of water from the Clarence River catchment. Our opposition is not based on some sense of "they're stealing our water". Rather we believe that the Clarence River catchment has its own intrinsic values and that it is vital for the ecological health of the river and the sustainability of the Valley that river flows stay within the catchment.

Most of the Clarence catchment falls within the 100 km wide coastal strip of New South Wales, an area which supplies approximately 20% of the state's agricultural produce. The local economy is largely based on agriculture, commercial fishing, forestry and tourism. The annual value of agricultural produce exceeds \$70 million while the combined value of estuary and ocean fishing exceeds \$77 million annually. The Clarence River estuary is one of only four authorised estuary fishing sites in NSW and is by far the largest, while the commercial fishing fleets of Yamba and Iluka are the largest in New South Wales.

Shipping plays an important role in the forestry industry with bulk loading of timber from docks in the Clarence River at Goodwood Island, Harwood and Yamba. Clarence Valley tourism exceeds \$50 million per annum.

One Shepparton farmer expressed the view of many irrigators when he said on ABC Rural on October 14, 2010 "We need more water and there's thousands and thousands of gigalitres of water that just run straight into the sea in this country".

(<http://www.abc.net.au/rural/nsw/content/2010/10/s3038483.htm>.)

Valley Watch challenges the notion that water is 'wasted' if it flows out to sea. The river's natural rise and fall is never wasteful. Floods rejuvenate ecosystems, especially the floodplains and wetlands, 'freshes' expand habitat and provide food sources vital for breeding, and the low flows are needed to prevent those species which do best in stable conditions from dominating and creating an imbalance. The Healthy Rivers Commission Final Report in 1999 - eleven years ago - concluded that *'any proposal to divert substantial volumes of water from the Clarence is likely to present significant risks to the health of the river system.'*

The farmers, the fishing industry, forestry and tourism are all under threat if water is diverted from the Clarence catchment. The Clarence River is of great significance to the local indigenous community as well:

(<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/parks/LowerClarenceAboriginalTouristSite.pdf>).

Most of the popular images of the Clarence River showing what appears to be a wide full river, are from within the one third of its length which is saline and strongly tidal. In its upper reaches – where a possible dam site has been suggested – it looks like this:



Speaking to the NSW Shires Conference on June 6, 2007, the then Mayor of Clarence Valley Council, Ian Tiley, said:

The people of Clarence see themselves as guardian of the catchment's water and as local custodians of a vital local resource, and oppose any interference with the river. Environmental impacts from any diversion would be of great magnitude, and unsustainable. The environmental health of the largest river on the biggest flood plain in eastern Australia is of paramount importance. <http://www.clarence.nsw.gov.au/content/uploads/05009-07.pdf>

His words are as relevant in 2010 as they were in 2007.

Yours faithfully

Gary Whale
President