

KEITH & MARGARET BURGE

9th December 2024

To Whom It May Concern

I write today in regard to the proposed increase in water charges by Water NSW and WAMC.

I do not support any of the proposed increase in charges.

The proposed increase is eye wateringly exorbitant & I am surprised there is not some regulatory body that would rule the size of this increase illegal.

Is the Government responsible in providing some validation of the proposed charges?
Where will the extra income from the increased charges be spent?
Why is it deemed necessary?

Why are irrigation farmers within an irrigation area such as Coleambally Irrigation Area being charged the proposed increase when Coleambally Irrigation as a Co-operative already meets the Water NSW & WAMC charges along with the Coleambally Irrigation delivery charges? It is a completely different scenario to individual river pumpers.

Is the proposed charge increase designed to squeeze irrigation farming out all together?

Will the Government be held accountable for where the proposed increased costs be spent & be able to provide an audit process of what the charges were meant to achieve or is it just a free hit on an industry that relies on the integrity of the Government of the day?

Irrigators already shoulder an unfair portion of Water NSW & WAMC charges as we pay fixed charges regardless of the size of the allocation. There is no reliability to the allocation announcements. The existing water charges create a major expense in cash flow and to suddenly increase these charges by the proposed amounts will create significant hardships. Particularly hard hit will be the medium sized family business such as the one I represent. Yes we hold multiple farms to create economies of scale.

Yes we hold a reasonable sized water portfolio in order to ensure continuation of the cropping program.

And you know what ????

This approach means the farms support 3 families along with 2 permanent employees!!
We source all our farm inputs from local business' within Coleambally which in turn keeps locals in a job!!

Our family members have children who attend the local school & play sport locally !!
In case nobody had thought of the socio – economic impact of these points it means if our business does not thrive let alone survive then -
We as a community can not keep teacher numbers in schools without students.
We can not keep sporting teams intact which is the fabric of any small country town.
It means the water infrastructure within the Coleambally Irrigation Area could become a stranded asset.

Come on wake up Water NSW & WAMC.
Since when can any business absorb cost increases such as those proposed without significant hurt to a business along with the risk of a business being sold & people moving away.
There is the risk of collapse of the permanent water market as investors lose faith in water as a regulated investment. As a valid investment which in turn creates a vibrant temporary water market & on which many of the corporate investors rely for permanent plantings.
Large increases in Water charges will turn the investment community elsewhere.

Irrigation business' and communities have already undergone significant change absorbing the ramifications of the Government policy on Water Buybacks which have hit hard.
Your current proposed charges increase may be the straw that breaks the camels back.

It would seem the Government has failed to conduct any sort of valid research into the socio-economic impact of the proposed charge increase & I would go so far as to feel that constitutes a violation of human rights.

Will there be transparency in regard to the State and Federal Government paying the proposed increase in charges? The Commonwealth Government at this stage holds a major permanent water portfolio. Maybe the State Government is taking a free hit at the Commonwealth Government & is prepared to sacrifice irrigation business' in the process.

Water charges need to be spread across every single member of our state similar to roads and railways. Utility costs need to be shared.

Answers must be provided to all of the above points.
Why should small business continually struggle to meet endless Government charges let alone massive increases in Government charges with very little notice.
We have no capacity to pass on these increases to our end users when trying to compete in increasingly tight world markets.

Please do due diligence on your proposals not just hurl them at the irrigation community with no thought to the consequences.

Yours Faithfully
Margaret Burge

