

15 October 2012

## Macquarie River Water Pipeline

I welcome the opportunity to make submission in relation to the Macquarie River Pipeline Project to Orange.

The sustainable management of water resources is essential in supporting and enhancing economic development.

Water is realistically a limited and precious resource and must be managed both for immediate needs and for long term economic and environmental sustainability.

The Ben Chifley Dam at Bathurst is a critical resource which provides a reliable and sustainable supply of water for households, irrigators, farmers, industry, business and the environment. With the growth and development of the City of Bathurst and the decision of Bathurst Regional Council to increase the capacity of Ben Chifley by raising the height of the wall in 1999 ensured that the immediate future needs and demands of Consumers were catered for.

This however does not mean that Bathurst will have as secure and sustainable water supply without continuing to plan for the future. Whilst the Ben Chifley Dam has a capacity of 30000ML, without adequate rainfalls the capacity of the dam diminishes very quickly.

Whilst Orange City Council is relying upon data for annual rainfall patterns, it needs to also take into account that whilst Bathurst has not had severe water restrictions, that in the future if the situation was to worsen and there were less flows into the Macquarie River then Bathurst would not have future restrictions placed upon its water security needs because of the Macquarie River Pipeline.

The City of Bathurst would need to know that future planning would not restrict it from looking at and building a pipeline of its own from the

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Ben Chifley Dam to the Water Treatment Works; Bathurst at a future date can do its own stormwater harvesting; Bathurst not be required to return the full 8ML of treated water back into the river system each day from the sewerage treatment works if it is needed on the city for residents or businesses.

These factors will further impact upon the flows down the Macquarie River and where the pipeline extracts water from the Macquarie River.

Consideration needs to be given to ensure that Bathurst is not placed in an untenable situation whereby future growth can't proceed because of the growth of Orange and the Macquarie River Pipeline Project.

Whilst the Macquarie River Pipeline Project has been a divisive issue in the Orange community, it has also clouded the consideration of other issues and other options that should be thought out both from the point of view of long term costs and potential future changes in water supply to other towns.

### **Key facts**

Orange has confronted significant water restrictions for nearly a decade and at this time Orange City Council are investigating a range of options to diversify water supplies.

There are several scenarios that have been identified by Orange City Council in consideration of future directions. Primarily, two of these are:-

**Raising of the Suma Park Dam Wall** (comparative Cost of \$4M with estimated total project costs of \$16M)

A 1m rise of the dam wall will increase the storage capacity by 10% and this project can be incorporated into current works and Councils overall water security strategy.

### **The Macquarie River Pipeline (Estimated cost \$47 Million)**

The existing and future water needs of the Orange Community have been identified. Projected at this time is that consideration has been given to the extraction of water from the Macquarie River 135 days of the year. it is further intended that there will be a maximum extraction rate of 12ML/day (1620ML over x 135 days) and water will be pumped over a period of 19 hours per day (2565 hours x 135 days ultimately delivering 2,700ML per annum to met the projected demand to 2060

**Other projects for consideration – Lake Rowlands upgrade** and construction of a new dam wall (estimated cost \$150m) proposal purports to increase the water security of the Central West. Additional cost of a Pipeline from this facility is an estimated cost of \$53m

## **Storm water Harvesting (currently under examination)**

(Source-Environmental assessment – Macquarie River to Orange Pipeline GHD August 2012, Orange City Council Water Security Site, Report to General Manager/Council Meeting 17<sup>th</sup> November 2011)

Whilst taking into consideration the need for water security for Orange that is consistent with surrounding regional centres I feel that further investigation of the raising of the wall at Suma Park Dam could be given greater assessment before the installation of the pipeline be contemplated.

In addressing the aforementioned costs regarding the options outlined I feel at this point of time this is the most economically viable project.

The cost and impact of this project raises questions as to whether the pipeline can be engineered and constructed within the timeframes associated with the funding. Additionally if the project goes beyond the proposed estimates then will it be the ratepayers of Orange City Council who will have to pay for the cost blowout or will it fall back to the NSW Government.

From a Community perspective I have been contacted by a substantial number of individuals, groups and businesses and been made aware of the ongoing concerns of the Bathurst Community as to the detrimental impact of taking water from the Macquarie River would have on consumers in the event of drought and reduced capacity of the Ben Chifley Dam. (such as occurred in 2003 when the dam was at 40.7% capacity and restrictions were imminent).

Further concerns have been raised by the Central Acclimatisation Society (A Statutory Body), Fly Fish Bathurst, the Orange and Region Water Security Alliance and Friends of the Macquarie River in regards to the inaccuracy of reports given to Orange City Council Aquatic Consultants in relation to the Statement they made "unlikely to have a significant impact because no threatened fish species were recorded in the study area". The Consultants failed to identify the Trout Cod recovery program for this section of the River despite the fact that information relating to this is readily available. The Consultants also admitted that their Study was only a 'snap shot' due to time and financial constraints.

The proposed extraction point for the Pipeline is a key area for threatened and endangered species.

The issues for consideration are:

- the pipeline will take water from very low flows for long timeframes during drought periods.
- The area currently under consideration for the pipeline site provides very important habitat for many threatened native fish.

- All avenues of research need to be undertaken in relation to the alternative solutions to enhancing a sustainable water supply to the City of Orange before any determination is given to the Pipeline project.
- Consideration of impacts to the City of Bathurst and its water supply in the medium to long term.
- Are the timeframes and estimates of the project realistic for both engineering and construction of the Macquarie Pipeline to take place.

In closing, I would not, at this time, support the Macquarie River pipeline project.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Toole". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'P'.

Paul Toole MP

Member for Bathurst Electorate