

21 AUG 2009

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

13/09

Study Tour Report South Australian Liberal Party Southern Basin Tour

Date: 17th May 2009 to 22nd May 2009

By: **Adrian Pederick MP**
Shadow Minister for the River Murray

Subject: New South Wales Southern Irrigation System

Accompanied by: Patrick Secker MP (Federal Member for Barker), Mitch Williams MP (Shadow Minister for Environment and Conservation), Leonie Williams, Tim Whetstone (Liberal Candidate for Chaffey), Andrew Gregson (CEO, NSW Irrigators Council), Mark Moore (Policy Analyst, NSW Irrigators Council), Tim Napier (EO, Border Rivers Food & Fibre)

Tour Objective:

The objective of this trip was to inspect the New South Wales Southern Irrigation System of the Murray Darling Basin to see how the system is managed.

This involved touring the Snowy Mountains to see how Snowy Hydro operates, and also where the Murray and Murrumbidgee are sourced in the southern Murray Darling Basin. It was a great opportunity to meet with Snowy Hydro, local irrigators and the NSW Irrigators Council representatives to see how systems are managed (hydro and irrigation) and to exchange local knowledge and points of view.

Sunday 17th May 2009

Depart Coomandook and pick up Tim Whetstone at Pinnaroo. Proceed to Wagga Wagga for overnight stay.

Monday 18th May 2009

Continued our travel to Canberra Airport and met Patrick Secker MP, Andrew Gregson, Mark Moore, Mitch and Leonie Williams. Travelled on to Cooma where we visited the Snowy Hydro Visitors Centre. Terry Charlton, CEO, and David Harris, Corporate Affairs Manager, for Snowy Hydro, gave a detailed presentation of the scheme. These presentations included an overview of the Snowy Scheme Physical Works and Operations, as well as the Snowy Scheme Water Arrangements, followed by a tour of the Snowy Mountains Control Centre. Snowy Hydro have invested a lot of money in technology upgrades in the last twelve years, and also in gas-fired power generation plants. The business model is based on Snowy Hydro's ability to act as an insurance company for power generation. With the ability to start up turbines in under ninety seconds, the company acts as an insurer against power needs spikes. The scheme was originally set up as an irrigation scheme but now only releases water when generation is required and vice versa.

Overnight Cooma.

Tuesday 19th May 2009

Travelled to Eucumbene Dam and noted it was at about 10% capacity. Went onto the Jindabyne Dam and inspected the \$95 million environmental flow works including the massive fuse system for flood management. Visited the Jindabyne Pumping Station and then travelled along a snowy mountain track to Murray 1 Power Station via Island Bend Dam, Guthega Power Station, Schlinks Pass, the Kerries Cloud Seeding site and Geehi Dam. Arrived later than scheduled at Murray 1 Power Station due to some fallen trees. We then visited the Khancoban Pondage. Continued on to Corryong where we were met by Mark Clayton (Area Manager Murray) and Russell Murdoch (Manager Outage and Access Murray).

Overnight Corryong.

Wednesday 20th May 2009

Departed Corryong for Albury and then on to Berrigan. Met with Jason Clancy (CEO, Southern Riverina Irrigators), Phil Snowden (Berrigan Irrigators Council), Michael Moloney (Chair, Berrigan Irrigators Council) and Bruce Atkinson (water representative for NSW Farmers Association). Continued on to Jerilderie where we toured Glen Rorato's tomato farm and processing plant. I was very impressed with the investment in irrigation tape made by Glen which helped him to double the efficiency of his water use. We then visited the Moloney irrigation property before arriving in Deniliquin. Had a briefing with Murray Irrigation who state they have a water delivery efficiency of 83%. It was noted that no Federal money had been spent to convert channels into piped systems and there wasn't much enthusiasm for this conversion.

** (note attached presentation – Murray Irrigation Ltd, Deniliquin)*

Overnight in Deniliquin.

Thursday 21st May 2009

Met with the Clancy Family at their Conargo Winery. Discussed local irrigation issues. Travelled onto Coleambally and had a briefing and a tour of the district. Coleambally Irrigation believe the buyback of water hasn't been managed well with people exiting the industry from right across the district. It could turn out that some people will stay in their homes but farm in another area to try and consolidate. They believe they are 90% efficient most of the time, but admit to 50% delivery efficiency at low volumes i.e. to deliver 3 gegalitres of stock and domestic water at the end of their system, 7 gegalitres is required. They are not keen to pipe water at all and indicated three feasibility studies showed this. Coleambally have improved their channel systems by installing electronic Total Channel Control systems. I believe they would make more savings than they indicate from piping their channels.

** (note attached presentation – Coleambally Irrigation Briefing)*

Departed for Leeton where we met with representatives from SunRice and the Rice Growers Association. We were informed that they had some of the best storage facilities for rice in the world. Also we were told that rice growers were in the ninth year where production levels were below consumption. They usually represent 25% of the world's traded rice. Drought support has been vital, but this can't go on for much longer. SunRice is Australian owned and growers have doubled yields per megalitre of water since the early 1980's. SunRice have had to import rice and believe it is vital to satisfy demand in the Pacific region

** (note attached presentation – SunRice/RGA Briefing).*

Travelled to Griffith following the Irrigation Way, where Jennie Hehir, CEO of Murrumbidgee Private Irrigators, Karen Hutchinson, Executive Director of the Murrumbidgee Horticulture Council, and local irrigators joined us.

Overnight stay in Griffith.

Friday 22nd May 2009

Met with Murrumbidgee Irrigation and given a briefing. We were told that they believe there will be 25% less water over time. Losses were believed to be normally around 20 – 30% but probably around 40% now because of the long dry period. Some piping and concreting of channels has happened in this area. Also ordering water has been upgraded from a card system to an automated system. Had a tour of a pumping station and the Barren Box Infrastructure Upgrade to better manage water

** (note attached presentation – Murrumbidgee Irrigation Presentation)*

Departed Griffith and then travelled home to Coomandook.

Summary:

The trip was very enlightening to see how Snowy Hydro and the irrigation system operated in the NSW section of the Southern Murray Darling Basin. It was interesting to see that some upgrades had been made to some systems but also noted; was the general reluctance to pipe the present channel systems. Similarities in how irrigation areas were seeing land retired compared with what has been happening in SA. This was despite some significant difference in percentages of irrigation allocation between areas. The random retiring of irrigation properties was also shown as a major concern, especially in water delivery efficiencies.

Recommendations:

- The piping of channel systems should be underway because \$5.9 billion was set aside for this.
- Starting from stock and domestic channels and then working through the systems.
- I believe a more equitable system of allocating high security water should be implemented throughout the whole of the Murray Darling Basin.
- The whole Basin should be managed as one, including all the tributaries in the northern and southern basin.
- Money set aside in the Federal \$10 Billion plan needs to be spent now on upgrading the channel systems and also modernising all the metering systems.
- Overallocation of the system has to be addressed to allow for the recovery of the Basin as a priority.
- I also recommend the interaction of people in the Murray Darling Basin so that everyone gains a better understanding of the system.

Signed

Adrian Pederick MP JP
Shadow Minister for the River Murray
20th August 2009

