

To: Essential Services Commission'

water@esc.vic.gov.au

2024 Water Price Review

Essential Services Commission

Level 8, 570 Bourke Street

Melbourne VIC 3000

03) 9032 1300

July 18 th 2022

Re: 2024 Goulburn-Murray Water price review Draft guidance paper 21 June 2022

I am writing to you in support of the submission on behalf of the Unregulated Domestic and Stock water users, as has just been forwarded to you from the Upper Ovens region of Victoria. We are also water users on our farm in Browns Plain Indigo Shire, but we get our water not from a regulated supply which incurs significant costs to GMW, but from our private bore from a small local **unregulated** aquifer, and we cover all the expenses associated in running and maintaining our bore. Our licence is for 95 ML, but we rarely use over 10ML per annum, but even so we are charged for the full 95ML/Annum as GMW states the charges are not for water used, but just to own the licence payable on a yearly basis. Really? A previous attempt to make this type of situation fair to water users resulted in a government instigated and paid for, high profile legal challenge, far beyond the ability of farmers to challenge. This made a mockery of the Essential Service Commission being in place to look after the interests of users not the corporations, so the corruption and dereliction of duty of a government organization (the ESC) in this instance was obvious. **This must be addressed.**

Regarding the GMW charges, we are charged for all the same costs associated in supplying water to users getting water from a storage dam, river or channel supply, which in turn require very significant input from GMW staff for maintenance, operating and monitoring.

I mention our own situation as an example of where the system is not working satisfactorily for those commercial users using privately owned and maintained bore pumps to access their water needs.

A further challenge to legitimate regulated dam, river, and channel water users, is water trading by speculators with a sophisticated computer operation that virtually ensures genuine users are unable to bid on any water on the open market at a given point in time. This ensures speculators are able to access water rights at the best available price and sell it to water users in future trading when the price is much higher. This in effect increases the farmers cost of production often to the point of making their

business unviable or increasing the price of food to consumers. An example of the damage this is doing to Australian agriculture and consumer's, is the collapse of the dairying industry throughout Australia. If the water managers were doing their job properly this would not be the case. This of course is having a significant effect on food availability to consumers. This is especially the case when overseas interests have taken Australian water that was previously allocated to Australian farmers, to grow their own crops on Australian soil at the expense of local upstream historic users. This not only affects local users but takes rivers above full supply level causing flooding along the rivers and stream bank erosion. All these issues must be managed competently by GMW and other water managing establishments.

What is note-able is that GMW has massively increased staff salaries, especially for executive staff, and upgrades of their offices to luxury standards with water users bearing the brunt of these costs via water charges. Compare this to food producer's bottom lines and it is clear that water cost increases are not justifiable.

The management of water supplies from storages along rivers also leaves much to be desired in terms of flooding on farms close to rivers, and severe silting when water releases are excessive. Local water management for individual farmers who normally access stock water (licenced) from creeks flowing into rivers, are not allowed to access the same water out of the river downstream of the creek for convenience of their stock management needs, This restriction is an un-necessary burden on these farmers, and needs to be addressed, perhaps by removing the restriction and putting a meter on the pump in the river location to monitor the volume of water . Bearing in mind that the Australian Constitution specifies that water must be made freely available when needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input and considered feedback to ESC

Further Guide-lines on the lead into the upcoming GMW 2024 pricing review.

Yours Sincerely

Roger Hall

Earthcare farm Australia

On behalf Legitimate Australian users of water for food production.