

Water for Natimuk Lake Committee

Mr David Heeps
Chief Executive Officer
Essential Services Commission
Level 2/35 Spring Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000

Saturday, 19 January 2013

Dear David,

FEEDBACK - Recreation Water Contribution June 2012

Thank you for this opportunity to provide formal feedback on the proposed Recreation Water Contribution levy for GWMWater customers, as discussed at the recent community engagement public forum held in Horsham on 28 November 2012.

I am writing to you on behalf of the Water for Natimuk Lake Committee (WNLC). This committee consists of a small group of members passionate about the benefits of having a permanent allocation of water for Natimuk Lake. The committee members represent a large number of local water users.

In principle we agree that it is appropriate for residents to contribute to the cost of recreation water. This is especially useful in that the proposed contribution would be used to further subsidise the already discounted volumetric rate for water supplied to lakes and weirs from \$48 ML to \$20 ML making the maintenance of water levels in recreation lakes more affordable for users.

GWMWater have clearly stated that *"a specific objective of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project was to provide greater certainty for the provision of recreation water in the region"*, however it seems that only a very limited number of lakes in their catchment area are provided with recreational water despite all GWMWater customers being charged the proposed levy.

The WNLC supports the stance of the Horsham Rural City Council (HRCC) regarding the proposed \$16 recreation contribution charge. Whilst it is acknowledged that HRCC, along with all other local government areas in the GWMWater catchment, will benefit from the subsidised water supplied to eligible sporting clubs there is no provision for water to be supplied to our recreation lakes. The largest population base in the GWMWater catchment will contribute significantly to the recreation water charge and as such warrants an annual allocation of water for its recreation lakes, including Natimuk Lake.

The GWMWater customers in the HRCC area have contributed greatly to the cost of building the Wimmera Mallee pipeline and the subsequent water savings made as a result of this infrastructure. The completion of the pipeline has provided a feasible opportunity to deliver this long needed

security of supply to the recreation lakes in the HRCC area, in particular Natimuk Lake. The recent sale of 28,000 megalitres of Wimmera irrigation water to the Federal Government has provided a significant volume of water that could be allocated for recreation and/or environmental purposes.

Natimuk Lake has high environmental, tourism and recreational value and would become an important, sustainable tourism destination and recreational haven if there was a secure supply of water to the lake. Natimuk Lake has extensive existing infrastructure in the form of a popular caravan park, public toilets, entertainment pavilion, water ski clubrooms, walkways, grassed areas, playground equipment, jetty and two boat ramps. The majority of which has been self-funded.

It is worth noting that Natimuk Lake is a nationally significant wetland, listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia. Natimuk Lake has been listed on the *Important Bird Areas in Victoria* website and plays a role in supporting threatened water bird species including the Great Egret, Freckled Duck and the Blue-billed Duck. Five waterbird species protected by international migratory bird agreements regularly visit Natimuk Lake and Natimuk Creek. The environmental value of Natimuk Lake has been referred to frequently by many conservation and environmental organisations.

If Natimuk Lake was to be allocated 3,000 to 4,000 ML per annum the lake would become a permanent provider of significant environmental, economic, tourism and social benefit to all users.

As it stands, we do not support the Recreation Water Contribution levy while the premier recreation lakes in the region are not included on the list of lakes to receive an annual 'top up' supply from the savings generated by the construction of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.

We invite you to visit Natimuk Lake if your schedule permits. We would be delighted to show you first hand the recreational, environmental and social value of this unique lake. We look forward to discussing this issue with you further at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Mary A Smith

Mary Smith
Secretary,
Water for Natimuk Lake Committee

cc: The Hon Ted Baillieu, MP
Mr Peter Brown, CEO HRCC
The Hon Hugh Delahunty, MP
Mr David Grimble, Mayor HRCC
The Hon Peter Ryan, MP
The Hon Peter Walsh, MP
Mr Mark Williams, CEO GMMWater