

Is the water allocation and management scheme comprehensible and fair?

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It is appreciated that the Inquiry has a specific task. It is my view however that doing bits of the system will produce bitsy outcomes. This is a plea for the whole water allocations and associated issues be treated together to simplify and make it consistent for all users. The lessons of Israel are pertinent.

It raises the question that needs to be clearly resolved – who really owns Australia's water? It is the nation's scarcest resource. It is a necessity for life, for communities including indigenous peoples, the environment and industry. A **wholesome consideration** needs to enunciate clearly what the principles of use should be. Currently it is a mess!

THE ISSUES

- Much has been written about the over-allocation of water in the Murray-Darling Basin.
- Issues of water stealing have dominated news from time to time.
- Some parts of the MDB are not metered and so manipulation seems easier. Some water users are able to avoid close and public scrutiny, notably the mining industry. Monitoring of the whole system is thus difficult.
- Speculators are making a killing with water trading, to the detriment of *bona fide* water users, with perverse outcomes.
- Water trading has water going to the (currently) most valuable crops to the extinction almost of key agricultural industries. Is that the intent, is it sustainable long term and is it totally desirable? Diversity is a risk management tool.
- It raises the question as to whether separating water from land titles was a wise decision.
- There are so many categories of water that make it almost incomprehensible to the layperson and ensures only those who are fully across the legislation can understand it and manipulate it. These vary across the nation's water resources.

MOVING FORWARD

- A review of water allocations, pricing and monitoring needs to be undertaken.
- This review needs to consider a national system of water categorisation, reducing the number of categories to a minimum and being applicable to all.
- No water should be used without going through a meter that links to a central monitoring system
- It is questionable whether there should be a trading scheme – if so, how might it be limited to users only