

Severn River Vineyard,  
Somme Lane, The Somme, Queensland Q 4382  
Owners (G.Copland and Karin Perisic)  
Email [perisick@bigpond.com](mailto:perisick@bigpond.com) and contact mobile and text 0413046932

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Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce,  
PO Box 6500,  
Canberra, ACT, 2000, Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Commonwealths Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper.

### **Our farm**

We own and manage a farm on the Severn River that produces wine grapes, beef cattle and solar energy. Our farm includes a weir on the Severn River and we have a licence to irrigate from the Severn River. All our production is exported locally and nationally. To date our grapes have won three national awards. Our business plans includes the export of wine to China. Our business plan is for a 10% ROI when fully established. Our farm is totally family owned, debt free and all development has been made/funded from our own savings. When we purchased the farm in 2001 it was derelict with no equipment, 'a dwelling' that had to be destroyed as it was so unsafe. There was no equipment but some poor quality irrigation lines that had been left by the previous owner. The fencing was either non-existent or of poor standard and it has taken many week of hard work make them safe for cattle and protect our crops from wildlife particularly deer that live in the adjacent crown reserve. Indeed there is a constant menace of trees falling from the reserve onto the fencing. Of course we have to deal with the market forces, droughts, floods, storms, hail, and frosts. and bushfires as well as wildlife breed in the crown reserve. This particularly applies to deer an introduced species like rabbits that cause havoc on primary production with the need for special fending. Everything else we have either purchased built or planted ourselves. This includes 15 fifteen acres of high quality wine grapes.

Against this background is noted the government apparent discrimination against investment in small farms/primary production with a cap on income against which expenses can be claimed (\$250,000). For some reason this cap does not apply to other classes of investors for example in the share market or real estate or even brothel services. Why does the government discriminate so blatantly against primary producers who are trying to feed the country? This compared to the support given to investors who just want 'a quick buck' on the share market or from the sale of house! Just to clarify a point on irrigation. All our grapes are irrigated. Irrigation is however not simply to provide water, but is used to fertilise the vines with essential nutrients. It is by far the most efficient methods of doing this process. Our dripper system is the most efficient system in the country.

### **Employment of local community on our farm**

On our farm we employ workers from the local community to assist with a mired of activities including pruning, spraying, irrigation and general farm work. All are our near neighbours. WE very much support our local community.

## **Our objections to the Emu Swamp Concept**

Over more than the last ten years we have provided numerous written well argued objections to the proposed Emu Swamp Dam based on the clearly stated objectives of the local council that it is principally intended to boost the local urban water supply for the purposes of allowing further commercial enterprises. It will clearly be no benefit to primary producers. These have all been ignored. The council now appears to have us on the 'do not contact or inform list' as we get no information. However the council continuously provides highly misleading and incorrect press statements to the local media. Clearly the local council does not understand the concept that generally rural township exist to support the local primary producers (except for mining, nursing home, retirees, the unemployed and the travellers).

Finally regarding the stated aim of the council to provide water security for the local township by the construction of the Emu swamp dam, as we have highlighted to the council there are several other methods of achieving this objective as a fraction of the cost of the new dam. These include:

1. Enlarging the current storm king dam
2. Prohibiting use of reticulated water for gardens
3. Encouraging the use of rain water tanks. Less than 10% of the prosperities in Stanthorpe have these tanks. (we have many)

## **The Green paper**

We support the Principles for Commonwealth involvement in water infrastructure projects but have serious concerns about the inclusion of the Emu Swamp Dam Project (on the Severn River) Stanthorpe in the potential list of water infrastructure projects that warrant possible Commonwealth involvement.

Severn River Vineyard is adjacent to and indeed located on a proportion of the proposed Dam. Our farm will lose both agricultural land and water supply from the Emu Swamp Dam. The Emu Swamp Dam Project has been long running. The funding of this dam would be a social and economic disaster that the people of the Stanthorpe and the Granit Belt would never recover from. The agricultural operations downstream would be destroyed. Our objections to the inclusion of the Dam in the Green Paper include:

- The Local Council has done significant work on this dam but has ignored findings of the original Unidel Report proposal. The State Government has approved the Emu Swamp Dam proposal on the basis of volume of work undertaken on the proposal and again the Commonwealth Government has done the same. This is dangerous considering that the initial consultancy has been ignored.
- It is a requirement of the Commonwealth that the project be **cost recoverable** the anticipated cost of 76 Million in our eyes is undervalued. We believe that this costing is a gross estimation of the true cost and we have estimated that it will be closer to several hundred million dollars (plus ongoing costs including pumping water a considerable distance and height) and provide no benefit to agricultural production in the region. The costing of this project when complete could have significant economic implications on the State and

Commonwealth Governments, Local Council and rate payers. It may well be one of those infamous financial disasters.

The Council has listed a number of funding options the bottom line is tax payers to fund 25% (you and I) and irrigators 75% (you and I again). It will always be cost recoverable is the community aware of this? No. **The stated intention of the Green Paper is to improve agricultural competitiveness;** there is no way that farmers in this district could afford the costs of water from this dam anticipated at \$3600 per mega litre (Stated in the Unidel Report).

- The green paper is about agricultural development which I am sure we are all for but the State document states 'pipelines linking the dam to regions existing water treatment plant and **potentially** to irrigation properties.' The Council states 5000ml to be quarantined for urban use i.e. if the dam level drops below this no irrigation. This is **dishonest** and the funding source is provided for agriculture and whereas both the Local Council and State Governments in their documents state that the water from the dam is to be used for the town residents and town industry.

**The Unidel Report** put the reliability of the proposed water supply at 100% for only six out of every ten years. Practically land owners would experience the same water supply in there dams during the six years and would not require irrigation therefore the tax payer would be required to pay more. During the four years in every decade when the dam is unreliable and growers want water the dam would be dry. Therefore we will not have any water for irrigation.

- Finally the Green Paper states that the community should be engaged and that a robust analysis of costs and benefits be used to assess infrastructure. I am yet to see this. The cost benefit analysis is of very poor quality and we have not idea of the costs to us as end users.

### **The Dam**

The proposed design of the dam is said to have a number of fundamental flaws in many aspects.

These include:

1. The proposed supply of water (to the Stanthorpe Township) required pumping to a height (head of pressure) that would make the entire process un-financial. The costs to the rate payers (and presumably attempted to be passed in part back to irrigators whether or not they wish to be involved, who would not be able to access the water as there would be none).
2. The dam profile is too flat and shallow with most of any water accumulated lost to evaporation
3. The data used by the council to justify the case is taken at the 'top of the wet cycle' and at least 4 out of ten years the dam would actually be empty. It is unclear how the council proposed to pump water from an empty dam.
4. The cost would be at least \$4,000 per ML. This is far in excess of that which irrigators (if they have access to any water) would be able to pay. At present primary producer's costs essentially limited to licensing and pumping and they are happy to take the weather as it comes as far as how much water is available in the river and its small weirs.
5. The principal justification for the regional council persisting with this proposal is the considerable funding that has already been wasted on its development. Over the years

it must be several million dollars and such use of taxpayers/ratepayers cannot be seen to have resulted in nothing.

**In summary we believe the construction of the Emu Swamp Dam will result in:**

1. The ruin of most/all downstream primary producers. At least fourteen (14) have been identified as being directly affected.
2. Reduce the flow into the Murray-Darling River system which is already under severe stress from excess allocations and climate change. However we understand for some reason this project has been exempted from the prohibition/limit of dams on the construction of the Murray-Darling system
3. A massive expense that the local community could never possibly ever repay or even pay the cost of maintenance and operation
4. A loss of amenities and natural local beauty of the region. The council has left many examples of horrible scars on the environment from previous such projects and has made no attempt to rectify their vandalism. Many examples are present between Stanthorpe and Ballandean. At least one as highlighted to the council poses a major public safety risk.
5. A loss of unique wildlife that inhabit the area (note that environmental approval has been granted despite major deficits in the methodology). For example some very rare and endangered plant and animal species do only live in or near the site the proposed dam.
6. There has never been a proper professional cost benefit analysis undertaken on the proposal. The council has indicated a cost of less than \$100 million. However a basis standard analysis using standard accounting processes indicates the true figure may be closer to \$600 million
7. The proposal has all the disastrous features of other dams that have been built in the Murray Darling system with use of selective data, failure to consider all environmental impacts and or course pandering to usually undeclared self interest groups
8. Interestingly primary producers are prohibited from building their own irrigation dams on their own properties that would use the rain that fall on their own property. I guess one could well ask who own the rain, air, sunshine, sky.....? the government. Of course government(the crown) is exempt from liability from any adverse effects from their resources, for example when their rain/floods, bushfires, storms cause damage to private property, or even trees falling on fence lines and placing livestock and the general community.

Thank you for considering our submission and we most strongly ask that the federal government reject the request for funding the Emu Swamp Dam for the reasons stated.

Yours sincerely,

Geoff Copland and Karin Perisic (Co-owners)

Sent y email and registered post

