

To the Commission into the Register of Foreign-owned Water Entitlements:

Water, water everywhere so now it's time to think (apologies to Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

My background covers several relevant areas: I have a family background of mixed farming in South East Queensland that used a spring fed lake plus a high rainfall for its agricultural purposes being cattle/weaner production and ginger farming; I have spent some 30 years in the 'high-end' food industry both in Australia and OS and count some of Australia's major food identities as personal friends; I have run a national, MLA-sponsored beef eating quality assessment across Australia (1996-2002); I hold a Masters in Environmental Management and Sustainable Development in the Field of Agriculture (UQ 2003) and was offered a PhD Scholarship by the Primary Industries Innovation Centre for the reinvention of agriculture on the NW slopes of NSW (circumstances prevented me from taking this offer up); I have been a key note speaker in various fora such as Ideas Festivals on Peak Soil and I have worked at both Committee and Board level for cattle brands.

I believe my background allows me to take an informed approach to Australia's captured/diverted water resources across : Who owns it? Where does such captured water come from? Where would it normally have flowed? What would it have supplied were it not captured/removed? For what purpose is this captured/diverted water used? Who owns that end purpose including the nationality of the owners of that end purpose of such re-purposed water? What is the production industry (eg cereal production, cotton...)resulting from the application of that water resource? Who owns the down-the-chain processing facilities based on those water-dependent products? Who and where is the market for these products? How and who owns the transport chain that gets these products to the end-customer markets?

Core to this whole issue of captured environmental flow water - even before considering who owns it - is that Australia has a unique geography that has been managing the water distribution across the 'driest inhabited continent on Earth' for some 40 million years (since separating from Pangaea). With only one major mountain chain - and a low one at that - Australia's blue print is one of flood plains providing a fertile soil resource. With only about 4% of soil biota named and identified we are largely ignorant of the huge 'spring back' capacity of these flood plain soils and the life they support after any flooding event. The life in these soils lies waiting, sometimes for years, before the pre-existing humus and biome elements are brought back to fertility by such flooding events. These soils have huge water/moisture retaining capacity and such a drenching will provide for several years. However the current practice of buying cheaper agricultural country away from such highly valued flood plains and then removing the overflow pattern from these valuable landscapes by diverting the water to the cheaper land with poorer soils is tantamount to throwing the agriculture of Australia down a porous pipeline. In the meantime such diversions will gradually turn those valued flood plains into deserts. The best example would be how cereal agriculture turned the famed Fertile Crescent of the Tigris and Euphrates deltas into a desert. Takes some thousands of years but it will happen.

Next to consider is the trading chain of such water. If the product is livestock who owns the feedlots and who owns the feed for the feedlot that requires irrigation before the livestock are ready for slaughter. Next question has to be who owns the processors/abattoirs/wool mills then who owns the retail outlets or export companies and who owns the ports, cargo ships and airports. If the water was owned by a foreign, possibly hostile entity what will happen if the tap is turned off from the water storage facility to the irrigators and to the processors?

The same can be applied to the cotton industry, the sugar industry, horticultural industries... which begs the question that a malign foreign interest can readily beggar Australia.

There is excellent data on Who Owns Supply Chain Australia under the title of Chain Reaction published by the Australian Ag Journal (November 2020) and a more recent publication (March 2021) across landholdings.

Somehow Australia needs to find an investment format that will have our own HNW individuals invest in owning Australia's water and landscapes rather than leaving farmers prey to the highest bidder who may not have the sovereignty of an Australia being owned by Australians at heart. To date our Super funds aren't putting their hands up for this. Without such an investor vehicle the taps to our agriculture, processing and mining could be turned off by a foreign power.

Re the current flooding - as someone who has been through 2 floods (not affected this time) I have long campaigned at rural events that Australia needs not just mega dams but a series of dams on either side of The Great Dividing Range and other mountainous zones for both water storage and flood mitigation. Such a project as an Australian-owned national infrastructure would go a long way in ensuring Australia's water is protected from the financial enticements of foreigners. I first became aware that our agricultural water was for sale when John Kahlbetzer and his Twynham Pastoral Company started buying up water rights from farmers thus taking landscape water to those able to pay the highest prices which were cereal and cotton farmers. That was about 20 or so years ago.

I can be contacted by email.

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