

Submission to IPART Re Lower Bogan Water Usage Charges

Submitted by John Hall, riparian landholder and Irrigator.

1. Brief History of Water Flows in the Bogan River since 1950.

My memory goes back to the massive floods of 1950 & 1951 when the river reached then record levels at the township of Nyngan.

For those landholders on the Bogan below the confluence of the Bogan River, the Gunningbar and Duck Creeks the situation was made even worse as floodwaters from the Macquarie river were diverted through regulatory structure near the township of Warren to alleviate the flood pressure on that town.

The same events occurred in 1955&1956 with a series of four moderate to major floods in a two year period. In between the two flood periods 1950-51 and 1955-56 the river only ran spasmodically due to lack of water in both the Bogan and Macquarie systems.

From 1957 through to 1969, the Bogan river only flowed spasmodically as rainfall events occurred in the catchments. The completion and filling of Burrendong Dam on the Macquarie River near Wellington saw regulated flows come into the lower Bogan and for period of approximately 30 years saw a basically uninterrupted, albeit low flow levels in the Lower Bogan. This flow was supplemented by run off in the Bogan Catchment.

2. History of Irrigation on the Bogan River since 1970.

With the regulated flow in the Lower Bogan, a number of riparian landholders applied for and were granted licences to irrigate. Some of these licences included the ability to construct off stream storages so that flood or excess water flows could be stored for later use.

Irrigation licences came in two forms. One was classed as a low or normal flow license. The other type of licence was the high flow licence which could only be held if an existing low flow was also held.

The conditions attached to the normal flow licence were fairly stringent at what levels of flow were required at certain gauging points along the river. However permission could be obtained from the Water Resources supervisor at Warren to irrigate if the flow was below the required level.

Generally, the regulated flow into the Bogan was designed to provide a stock and domestic supply throughout the entire length of the lower Bogan to its confluence with the Barwon River between Bourke and Brewarrina. Irrigation was not ever really available from this flow and certainly could not be relied upon.

The last period in which local Bogan caught water was readily available was from mid1996, through to the end of January 2000. Since that date there have only been spasmodic short term flows available from which to irrigate. The longest of these short term flows was from December 2007 to January 2008.

Statutory Water Charges

When the charges for water were first introduced in 1996/97 the level of charge was quite reasonable and irrigators generally accepted these charges.

However as years went on and the drought years imposed on us, there was little or no water for irrigators to access. At the same time the “Water Availability” charges increased quite dramatically to the extent that they became a major cost that involved accessing overdraft facilities to pay.

The increases in these charges were in the region of 4.7% above the CPI, whilst the irrigator’s terms of trade had decreased by something like 90 to 100%.

ABARE figures show that across the board, bulk water charges represent a small proportion of irrigators input costs. However ABARE worked on the presumption that water would be available to irrigate. Having to pay for an input which is not available represents a much higher proportion of overhead costs and in most cases, the impost is not affordable under drought stressed financial situations.

In the period July 1, 2000 to June 30, 2003, flows in the Bogan River would have allowed irrigation on 20 days, ie Flow rate exceeded 125 mega litres per day at a stream gauging station known as Monkey Bridge. On a percentage basis this equates to 1.8% of total number of days in a year that irrigation could have taken place legally.

To have to pay a full “Water Availability” charge is a severe impost.

Replies to letters written by me, from State Water and Department of Natural Resources at the time referred to the extra cost of making water available for stock and domestic use, not irrigators, but the costs of delivery needed to be recovered from irrigators as to recover the costs from stock and domestic users would have been politically unacceptable.

If this in fact the case, it would smack of discrimination.

Future Water Charges

IPART is currently considering charges for unregulated rivers for the next 5 years.

In considering the setting of the new charges for the Bogan River, the following should be taken into account:

1. The low and erratic rainfall received over the catchment—average mean rainfall over the whole catchment is less than 425mm.
2. Flows that can be accessed by irrigators based on 125megs at Monkey Bridge seldom last more than 30 days and never more than 40 days.
3. If charges for water supply become too high, irrigators will be forced to relinquish their licences and the cost burden will increase on those remaining eventually leading to a cessation of irrigation altogether. This will occur not only on the Bogan but on many other rivers as well.
4. NOW does not take into account the ability of the irrigation community to pay. Ability to pay should be one of the main criteria considered by IPART when delivering their findings and take into account that the irrigator is unable to pass on the cost of increased water charges.
5. Water flows managed by State Water through effluent creeks from the Macquarie River are generally not accessible to irrigators on the Lower Bogan, particularly when those flows remain below 1 ML per day for months at a time and quite often do not reach the confluence with the Barwon Darling River.
6. Bogan Catchment flows are short lived and whilst a crop may be sown on an irrigation event, there is no guarantee that water is going to be available to follow up and take the crop through to maturity.
7. It quite often happens when a rainfall event does occur that provides an irrigation flow, due to local precipitation, irrigation is not required and to irrigate would be detrimental to the land.
8. Of the four major irrigators on the Lower Bogan, only one has a storage that is capable of storing sufficient water to finish a crop off. There is currently an embargo on the construction of new storages.
9. As far as water availability is concerned, there are no structures on the Bogan that require routine maintenance by State Water apart from remote telephonic stream gauging stations that were installed as a flood

- mitigation measure after the 1990 flood event. These gauging stations should be largely maintained by the Department of Emergency Services or Bureau of Meteorology with a small contribution from State Water.
10. Several low level weirs exist on the Bogan to assist with stock and domestic supplies. The cost of maintaining these weirs should be carried by all water users along the river, not just irrigators.
 11. NOW needs to become more efficient in its operations and look at administering the Bogan River in its entirety from its office in Dubbo instead of splitting it into two sections, administering the portion in the Central Division from Dubbo and the portion in the Western Division from Tamworth.
 12. Given the above points, I would ask that IPART hands down a recommendation that irrigators on the Lower Bogan River not be subject to any increase in the "Water Availability" charge.
 13. I would also ask that IPART recommend that the water availability charge be confined to periods of flow in the Bogan River when water is available for us to utilize for irrigation based on flow meeting the required 125ML at Monkey Bridge.
 14. Continual restructuring of the bodies responsible for the administration of water throughout NSW is a cost that appears to be allocated to users of water. These changes are not leading to increased efficiency in administration and are of no benefit to irrigators and appear to be charged back to irrigators and other water users by way of increased charges.

In conclusion I would like to comment on the service I have had from State Water over the 40 years that I have held one of our licences. Apart from the initial measurement of the area to irrigated, I have not had a visit from a compliance officer. The other licence came with the purchase of a neighbouring property in 1991 and likewise I have not had a visit from a compliance officer for that licence either. It would appear that I am paying for compliance officers to visit other irrigators.

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Lower Bogan River