



The Yanco Creek & Tributaries Advisory Council Inc.

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22 March 2005

Bulk Water Prices from 2004/05
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
PO Box Q290
QVB Post Office
NSW 1230

Dear Lil,

SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF BULK WATER PRICING BY THE YANCO CREEK AND TRIBUTARIES ADVISORY COUNCIL.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the review of Bulk Water Pricing.

YANCO CREEK AND TRIBUTARIES ADVISORY COUNCIL (YACTAC)

We are a constituent Group of the Murrumbidgee Private Irrigators who in turn are a member of the New South Wales Irrigators Council. We are in agreement with both of their submissions and wish to make comment on areas of particular interest to us.

YANCO CREEK SYSTEM NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The State Water submission includes a separate section for the specific purpose of setting prices for the rehabilitation of the Yanco Creek System to improve flows and provide significant water efficiencies for the system and the Murrumbidgee Valley.

The plan has been developed as an outcome of the community consultation that took place during the latter part of 2002 and further consultation between September and November 2003. It was recognized that there is a need for a major upgrade of the infrastructure that delivers water to our communities. A number of issues were identified and this plan sets out how we will go about the work which needs to be undertaken. The work is a mixture of physical works, policy development, monitoring and coordination of projects – all which are aimed at ensuring the long-term environmental sustainability of the creek system.

An Integrated Catchment Management principled approach has been adopted by the governments of the Murray Darling Basin, and identifies natural resource management as a human activity, based on the values that our society holds, and acknowledges a sharing of responsibility. This plan takes a similar approach. The plan has been developed using integrated catchment principles as developed by the Murray Darling Basin Commission with a key principle being community participation in decision making.

YACTAC is of the view that this plan should be considered as a sub-regional implementation plan that will help achieve and be consistent with the outcomes and actions in the Murrumbidgee and Murray Catchment Blueprints, which is the overarching natural resource management strategy for the catchments. These blueprints in association with existing Water Sharing Plans and Regional Vegetation Management Plans will be the basis of Catchment Action plans to be formulated by the newly formed Catchment Management Authorities.

The Yanco Creek System Natural Resource Management Plan asks for commitment from both individuals and organizations; to share responsibility for underpinning the health and productivity of the Yanco Creek System both now and for future generations. The plan was formally launched by the Hon. Craig Knowles, Minister for Natural Resources at a function held at "Old Coree", JERILDERIE on March 1 2004.

The YCS has approximately 253 licensed water users and is some 799km in length. The YCS is the longest network of creeks in Australia. The average water volume used in the YCS is 160,000MI annually. Due to the area the system covers and vagaries of the Australia climate and landscape it is a very complex water supply system to operate. It is an absolutely critical water supply to a vast area of the Riverine Plains of NSW and supplies water to several towns along its path. These are Morundah, Urana, Oaklands, Jerilderie, Conargo, Wanganella and Moulamein.

Provision of regulated flows over a history exceeding a century has enabled the development of a diverse agricultural production base estimated to contribute in excess of \$340 million per annum to the national economy.

In recent years a number of key natural resource issues have brought about a review of the system from a range of Environmental, Economic and Social perspectives. It is now abundantly clear from community input and extensive assessment of the system's natural resource assets by Government Agencies and other experts, that unless the YCS receives immediate attention in a concerted effort by all stakeholders, the fruits of the system enjoyed by all including the environment may be eroded away by decisions taken to better manage the larger Murray Darling Basin. This situation is borne out by there being no direct provision for an environmental flow in the current Water Sharing Plans and the existing inherent water delivery losses that can occur in the system when distributing water to meet high demand periods.

Unsustainable volumes of water escape from the creek system through evaporation that occurs in weir pools, in low lying areas where high level creek flows escape then stream channel and spreads over adjoining farmland. Water in the YCS also benefits a network of old prior streams where the flow recharges the groundwater (identified as losses). Additionally, inflows that stem from dry land areas in the catchment, particularly from the upper Billabong, that flow over the weir at Darlot to meet end of system target flows expected of State Water are also recorded as delivery losses and make the total water delivery escapes in the system seem excessive. These in-system flows play a role of acting as environmental flows in the reaches below Darlot and are not a true indicator of inefficient use of water by system users. The overall accounting system for water in the YCS needs to be reviewed so a fair, transparent and equitable outcome is available for all water uses, in all valleys.

Four key issues have been identified in this plan and are supported by 30 Key Management Actions.

The four key issues are:

- Maintaining and improving a system of reliable water delivery.
- stream flow impediments
- Maintaining the Yanco Creek and system to enhance the riparian and ecological health of the system.
- Developing community ownership, participation and empowerment for managing the system's natural resources.

It is intended that the YCS NRMP will isolate issues threatening the productive and ecological values of the YCS and form the basis from which progress towards improving the natural resource status of the system can be measured.

To be successful, implementation of the strategic plan must develop on-going partnerships between community and government stakeholders to enable action in a co-ordinated and integrated manner.

Implementing the YCS NRMP will achieve the following outcomes:

- Water delivery losses as defined in this plan will be reduced to an acceptable level of 20% taking account of key factors such as accession losses to the groundwater system, overbank escapes in times of high flow and flood, evaporation and pilfering.
- Through the benefits of all actions undertaken as part of the plan that a net saving of 36.5 Gls of water will be achieved for alternate purposes such as environmental flows and off-sets for funding to undertake on-going maintenance and increased understanding of the system through more extensive scientific and technical investigations. These improvements in water efficiencies will also help maintain and improve resources for all Murrumbidgee Valley water users.
- That riparian health including native endangered flora and fauna species will improve by 8% by the year 2010.
- That predetermined and measurable water quality parameters at established monitoring sites will improve by 5% by the year 2010.

Achieving these targets will ensure the natural environment ecosystems and agricultural systems are maintained and improved so that future use can be continued and the resource base is not depleted. Considerable scope exists in the implementation of the plan to undertake significant remedial works within the YCS and thus improve water supply and ecological health. These works also provide significant opportunities for external investment from several current initiatives that desire water savings within the Murrumbidgee and Murray Catchments.

The recommended key Management Actions that this strategic plan has determined work needed in several key areas. These works centre on the following:

- Maintenance and construction works
- Investigational and scientific research studies
- Landholder on-farm works
- Organisational development and capacity building for YACTAC in policy formulation and project implementation and management.

- Assistance from government agencies such as State Water, DIPNR, NSW Fisheries and Department of Environment and Conservation and National Parks and Wildlife Service.

We have attached as Appendix One, the actions emanating from the plan.

YACTAC has undertaken significant consultation with members and stakeholders with regard to the levy which is proposed to be set at \$0.90/ML of entitlement for YCS irrigators and \$0.417/ML of entitlement for all Murrumbidgee users. (Total of \$1.317/ML of entitlement for YCS Irrigators).

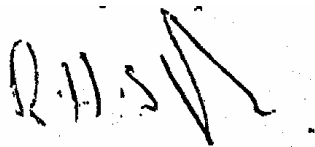
Yanco Creek Irrigators gave almost unanimous support to the concept of a levy and the Murrumbidgee Customer Services Committee of State Water also unanimously supported the levy as savings would be used to meet improved resource and end of system flows for the valley.

Implementing the YCS will achieve the following socio-economic outcomes:

- Securing the viability and sustainability of the rural communities who depend on irrigated agriculture for their livelihoods. Over 90% of the riparian zone is in private hands and is dependent on landholders being economically viable to ensure its management for future generations. Environmental outcomes can only be realized when socio-economic outcomes are realized.
- Ensuring future prosperity for the state and the nation.
- Enabling communities to invest in the well being of their natural environment.
- Developing community ownership, participation and empowerment in the management of their natural resources.

RECOMMENDATION

That IPART support the State Water Submission on inclusion of costs for implementation of the Yanco Creek System Natural Resource Management Plan.



Richard Sleight
Chairman

APPENDIX 1

Key Issue: Maintaining and improving the health of the creek and mimicking natural flooding events where possible.

Action Number	Action
ACTION 3.13(A)	That the current flow regime of YCS be investigated and modified if necessary, to best mimic natural flooding regimes and particularly wetlands.
ACTION 3.13(B)	That a scoping study be undertaken to identify and establish management needs to maintain and enhance key wetlands including natural wetlands and those created by water escapes and weir pools.
ACTION 3.14(A)	That the current water quality monitoring regime in place be assessed with a view to ensuring that it provides timely and accessible information on appropriate water quality parameters.
ACTION 3.14(B)	That a salinity audit of the YCS be undertaken that determines salt sources, its distribution and location in the system, so as to instigate management actions to control its accumulation and impact on the system and to measure export quantities.
ACTION 3.14(F)	That an integrated water quality and ecological monitoring framework be established to assess the effect of plan implementation. This to include riverine environment, in-stream water quality and town water supplies.
ACTION 3.14(G)	That a review be undertaken of flow and water quality recording network to meet current and future requirements, and with particular emphasis on the lower reaches of Colombo Creek to determine end of valley flow and salt load export from the Murrumbidgee valley.
ACTION 3.15(A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) That all land managers including farmers, irrigation companies, government agencies, local councils and regional weed management groups implement and coordinate weed eradication programmes along riparian areas of YCS. (ii) That YACTAC ensure weed identification, reporting and controls are key components in establishing a prioritised works and monitoring programme along the YCS. (iii) That control works programmes are formulated in consultation with government agency staff and comply with relevant legislation and noxious weed protocols.
ACTION 3.16(B)	That current research techniques e.g. daughterless carp (induced sterility measures) to control the persistence and spread of carp into inland waterways be supported.
ACTION 3.16(C)	That the YACTAC NRMP strategies and actions are consistent with Murray and Murrumbidgee Catchment Blueprints.
ACTION 3.19(A)	That any creek works be undertaken following a coordinated and integrated approach involving consent authorities and with regard to whole of system strategy.
ACTION 3.19(B)	That YACTAC investigate the possibility of the YCS NRMP and associated works, be used as a pilot project for trialling improved integrated approvals being developed by government agencies.
ACTION 3.21	That the YACTAC requests appropriate authority to have a formal and permanent consideration of environmental flow requirements for the YCS.

ACTION 3.25(B)	That YACTAC ensure that works are carried out in accordance with the regulations contained in the National Parks Act 1974 pertaining to Aboriginal sites of cultural significance.
ACTION 3.27(A)	That the Landholder proposal currently being drafted be supported and endorsed on completion to expedite its implementation to return 11.5 GL's of water for environmental flows.
ACTION 3.27(B)	That the following revised target flows for Warriston Weir be implemented as soon as possible: Target 1. Unregulated/rain rejection flows <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That unregulated/rain rejection flows be permitted to pass through the Forest Creek system for environmental purposes. (It should be noted that from an operational point of view this is extremely difficult to implement because of the inadequate capacity of the Forest Creek off-take and the Forest Creek Regulated Section to allow those flows to pass through.) Target 2. 'Summer' target flow at Warriston Weir <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That a target flow of 80ML/day at Warriston Weir be provided from the beginning of November to end March. Target 3. 'Winter' target flow at Warriston Weir <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That a minimum target flow of 60ML/day at Warriston Weir be provided from beginning of April to end October.
ACTION 3.27(C)	That funding be secured for infrastructure to return flows to Billabong Creek.
ACTION 3.27(D)	That proposed changes to the flow regime be monitored annually to assess the social, economic and environmental impact.
ACTION 3.28(A)	That the operation of the Forest Creek off-take regulator and its impact on the Wanganella Swamp be considered in wider YCS assessment of environmental outcomes and related flows.
ACTION 3.28(B)	That McCrabb's regulator and adjacent spillway be modified and appropriately upgraded.
ACTION 3.28(C)	That the operation of McCrabb's regulator be monitored as a consequence of the modifications in (B) above.
ACTION 3.29	That flooding of the Cobb Highway at Wanganella be mitigated by redesigning and refurbishing the Estuary Creek Regulator and McCrabb's regulator.

Key Issue: Maintaining and improving the riparian habitat (creek corridor biodiversity) along the creek system.

Action Number	Action
ACTION 3.5(A)	That a draft strategic program be developed for willow removal, bank stabilisation and revegetation providing prioritisation and timeframes for any proposed staged development.
ACTION 3.5(B)	That the program of willow removal, bank stabilisation and revegetation be submitted and approved by relevant government agencies.
ACTION 3.6	That the extent of cumbungi in the Yanco Creek system be monitored, with a view to the possible need for future control. This is to involve possible targeted areas where chemical control options would be trialed and monitored to determine efficient and effective control measures.
ACTION 3.15(B)	That land managers, implement recognised best practice management techniques for the management of stock adjacent to riparian areas. Best management practices may include fencing off areas to exclude grazing

	stock and allowing natural regeneration.
ACTION 3.15(C)	Those areas of high conservation value riparian areas be identified with a view to developing 'best management practices' and using funding incentives to maintain and improve riparian and wetland habitat. Best management practices may include fencing off areas to exclude grazing stock and allowing natural regeneration.
ACTION 3.15(D)	That DIPNR and CMA's through incentive programs continue to raise community awareness of the value of protecting riparian habitats, and the importance this plays in contributing to ecologically sustainable management.
ACTION 3.17	That the YACTAC seek access to vegetation management incentives to facilitate the opportunity to achieve better management outcomes from managing the riparian pathway for conservation purposes.

Key Issue: Improving the overall deliverability and efficiency of supply for the entire creek system.

Action Number	Action
ACTION 3.2(A)	Request appropriate bodies to initiate a comprehensive water balance study of the entire Yanco Creek System to clarify definitions and interpretations of losses occurring in the system. This will improve the overall understanding of water losses and transport of flows within the system and of those which there is little control over in relation to delivery capabilities. i.e. channel capacities, weir distribution volumes and travel times.
ACTION 3.2(B)	Target for reduction of transmission losses to be from the current 43% to 20% over ten years. This equates to 35GL water savings per year.
ACTION 3.4	YACTAC to consult with DIPNR, NSWf, DEC and State Water on applying an integrated approach for works along the system in order to meet legislative requirements. A holistic approach taking in the needs of both users and the environment for the entire YCS help achieve a streamlined consent process for the project.
ACTION 3.7	State Water Asset Management Branch liaise with DIPNR, NSWf and DEC staff where necessary and make provision in a State Water maintenance budget to include remedial works to prevent losses.
ACTION 3.8(B)	That all engineering options to improve operational and environmental management of the Yanco Creek system be appropriately assessed to determine their feasibility and cost benefit.
ACTION 3.9(B)	Following the Weir Review of the YCS, undertaken by State Water, YACTAC review the document with a view to developing a strategic approach to weir removal or retention that is consistent with the outcomes and objectives of this plan.
ACTION 3.9(C)	Where viewed appropriate and in line with operational needs and government policy, that State Water assist with the cost of refurbishment of important in-system flow structures.
ACTION 3.10	That YACTAC seek a meeting with the Murrumbidgee Customer Service Committee to pursue improvements to State Water's water ordering system including information and education of users on its use and the need for compliance.
ACTION 3.11(A)	That YACTAC instigate a demand management strategy be used during water shortages, for future management of supply in the YCS over the irrigation season.

ACTION 3.11(B)	That irrigators continue to order water weekly, with a two week forecast, as part of on-going management of supply in the YCS.
ACTION 3.14(E)	That a detailed hydrological analysis and modelling for the YCS be undertaken prior to any changes to existing structures or flow management.
ACTION 3.22(A)	That YACTAC, DIPNR and State Water develop a Memorandum Of Understanding with Murray Irrigation Limited and Coleambally Irrigation Cooperative Limited which guarantees supply of water from their channel systems to the YCS under agreed conditions.
ACTION 3.22(B)	That the YACTAC, DIPNR and State Water establish formal agreements with irrigation companies for surplus flows entering the system which would place parameters on flow volumes, timing of releases and water quality targets.
ACTION 3.23	That State Water in collaboration with relevant agencies (local government, community etc) establish and make a permanent commitment to an annual system maintenance program based on targeted work priorities to enhance the long term sustainability of the YCS.

Key Issue: Developing community ownership, participation and empowerment to improve the future management of the system's natural resources.

Action Number	Action
ACTION 3.1	That YACTAC in conjunction with State Water and NSW Agriculture explore measures to increase information flow to enable landholders to make strategic decisions in terms of what crop or pasture to grow for any year, and enable tactical decisions in terms of specific watering regimes for any given summer irrigation period.
ACTION 3.3	YACTAC in conjunction with State Water instigate a working party to investigate seasonal delivery policies for the YCS.
ACTION 3.8(A)	That YACTAC be proactive in discussing partnering opportunities with Murray Darling Basin Commission, Pratt Water and Snowy Hydro.
ACTION 3.9(A)	That YACTAC DIPNR and State Water undertake a combined information program to increase landholder awareness of weir ownership and/or licence conditions included in relevant legislation.
ACTION 3.12	That the YACTAC promote the availability of flow information on the Yanco Creek System to the YCS community in an accessible and easily understood format.
ACTION 3.14(C)	That YACTAC meet with Irrigation Companies and the EPA with a view to determining the licence requirements and conditions as they affect YCS and that this be made available to members.
ACTION 3.14(D)	That YACTAC work with the EPA and Local Councils and other bodies such as Fire Brigades and rescue squads to establish emergency management plans to control environmental emergencies. e.g. road accidents/chemical spills.
ACTION 3.14(H)	Provision of water quality and monitoring data to ensure landholders are better informed in related decision making.
ACTION 3.16(A)	Community participation programs to promote the control and commercial use of carp be supported and enhanced.

ACTION 3.20	That YACTAC set up a funding sub-committee to pursue all funding opportunities for the implementation of the NRMP.
ACTION 3.24	YACTAC to make members aware of limited provisions pertaining to compensation contained in the Water Act 2000.
ACTION 3.25(A)	That the YACTAC form an implementation steering group that is tasked with ensuring adequate consultation with stakeholders in the development management and review of the Natural Resource Management Plan.
ACTION 3.26	That YACTAC continue to support efforts by groups such as NSW Irrigators Council to improve the public's perception of irrigated agriculture.
ACTION 4.1(A)	That YACTAC seek external funding to initiate on-ground works which includes the employment of implementation personnel.
ACTION 4.1(B)	That all water users in the YCS contribute to the NRMA via a levy being \$1.50 per mega litre on entitlement and \$2.00 per mega litre on usage. This is to be charged as part of State Water annual water accounts.