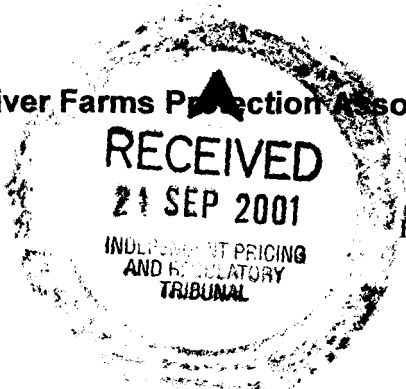


**Williams River Farms Protection Association**



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17 September 2001

Hunter Water Corporation Licence Review (Matter No. 01/368)  
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales  
PO Box Q290  
QVB Post Office NSW 1230

Dear Sir/Madam

Members of the Williams River Farms Protection Association are pleased to be able to provide comments on the ‘Review of Hunter Water Corporation’s Operating Licence’, July 2001.

As background, this Association, established in August 1966, is primarily involved in protecting the interests of landholders affected by the establishment and operations of the Seaham Weir. In carrying out our mandate we have maintained a dialogue with Hunter Water Corporation (HWC) on the operations of the Weir, in particular, farm drainage, maintenance of flood protection works and weir pool levels.

Principally our members are interested in ensuring that the ongoing operating management practices adopted by HWC in regulating the weir do not alter or affect the landholders primary production capabilities. Specific reference is made to sections of the Issues Paper, which we suggest for consideration in the HWC’s operating licence.

**Section 2.5 Possible approaches to licence regulation**  
**Section 4 System performance standards and measures**

Specific reference be made to HWC’s requirement to comply with the Seaham Weir Operation Plan, April 1996 {Umwelt(Aust) Pty Ltd, 1996) as an integral component of their management of the Seaham Weir. In ~~this~~ context we seek a more transparent reporting of performance standards to our Association, in relation to weir operation. These include

- Summary and details of all water quality data for the previous 12 month period
- Trends in water quality
- A statistical summary of daily, monthly and annual water inflows to the Seaham Weir pool
- Volumes of water extracted at Balickera Canal system
- Daily, maximum and minimum water levels at Boags Hill inlet
- A statistical summary of estimates of daily, monthly **and** annual downstream discharges from the weir pool
- Details of the number, type and duration of failures or breakdowns in relation to the operation of weir floodgates
- Details of fishway inspections and maintenance
- Details of farm floodgate inspections and maintenance.

Whilst these criteria form the basis of monitoring and reporting to DLWC, they also serve as useful benchmarks to improve system performance and deficiencies for improvement.

#### **Section 4.6 Use of indicators**

As alluded to before, the measurement of river water levels serve as the core function of weir gate operation. However, they fail to take into account the impact on protracted **farm** drainage and development of a key performance indicator to measure this factor would be useful in determining the effectiveness of the programmable logic control mechanism to remotely operate the weir gates during flow drainage modes.

Our Association is of the opinion that the weir pool water level should remain **as** constant as possible (between 0.42 mAHD and 0.5 mAHD) after farm drainage objectives have been accomplished. Under high flow conditions the weir spillway gates should be opened continuously to lower the weir pool to around 0.3 mAHD or lower to facilitate drainage of farms. Compliance of these measures and monitoring of customer (ie. farmer) satisfaction could provide for a useful indicator.

#### **Section 5 Environmental Requirements**

HWC has as a response to the Healthy Rivers Commission Report, December 1996, provided support to landholders in the supply of riverbank fencing and revegetation works. Whilst this is encouraging to some, the current riverbank fencing only accounts for a small proportion **of** the total river frontage. Assistance with revegetation and fencing should also be extended to include areas within the catchment, but not necessarily directly adjacent to the riverbank (eg. drainage channels leading to the river, and low lying swampy areas), that drain into the river and impact on water quality.

HWC should consider as part of its operating licence an ongoing commitment to improving water quality by offering increased incentives to improve farm management practices which impact on water quality, such **as**

- a) improving the uptake by landholders by encouraging restriction of cattle access to the river with contributions to maintenance and weed control
- b) rewarding primary producers who demonstrate best farming practices (such as minimum tillage cultivation techniques)

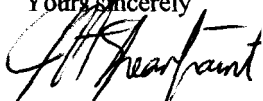
Suggest that provision be made in the operating licence for continued contribution by HWC to initiatives relating to catchment management obligations. Funding should be specifically pooled for use on the Williams River and it is suggested this be made available to the National Heritage Trust for use by individual landholders within the catchment or local community Landcare groups.

#### **Section 7 Public reporting and other issues**

Propose that public reporting mechanisms be improved to include an effective warning mechanism to notify landholders and river users of blue-green algae outbreaks.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission. We look forward to providing any further detail or comments. If you would like to discuss any of these matters please contact John Spearpoint on 0249 886213.

Yours sincerely



John Spearpoint  
Secretary