

The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP,
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

07/09/09

Dear Minister

Re: Tasmania's Interlaken Lakes

We are sure that you would be aware of the record rains received by Lakes Crescent and Sorell in recent times. We are equally sure that the Clyde River irrigators through the Tasmanian Government will have exercised their usual indecent haste to lay their hands on water allocations.

Without doubt the present water levels will enable an allocation through the Lake's Water Management Plan but we are concerned that now nature has relieved chronic recent conditions, consideration of irrigation allocations above all else will only recreate the environmental difficulties of the recent past.

We believe that there is no practical reason for allocations to be made considering the present position:

- Drought breaking rains have thoroughly soaked the catchment with the result that all water storages other than these lakes are spilling.
- Principal irrigators now hold many thousands of megalitres of water collected over winter.
- The River Clyde has been in a state of perpetual flood for some months and given the above these flows are likely to be sufficient to supply domestic, stock and irrigation flows for several months at least.
- The emergency supplies from the Shannon River are still available and indeed work is rapidly converting this supply to permanency thereby negating the need to draw extra water from these lakes.
- We believe that the prime motivating factor for irrigators to access Interlaken water is because of its lesser cost than that available from the Shannon. ***We suggest that allowing supplies on the basis of cost alone devalues the worth and importance of the environment.***

We suggest that there should be a far more conservative approach taken and alternative considerations given other than what now seems to be an automatic bequest to farmers as soon as any water becomes available.

Surely the most abnormal conditions for fifty years provide a wonderful opportunity to reinvigorate the environment so badly degraded by the injudicious management of the past?

Is it fair that both resident and visiting recreational users should again be ignored in favour of the farming community when their water supplies already abound bearing in mind that this sector also has a very significant monetary value?

Minister, we suggest that now is the time to consider the more highly placed surety of the environment rather than the lower priority of irrigation water which is at present not required.

As an example of this prior to 1996 when the lakes were last at full supply levels Crescent contained major beds of Triglochin which were an important feature of the RAMSAR site together with the Clyde Marsh. At end of last summer this species had all but disappeared but is beginning to re-emerge following the remarkable turnaround in Lake conditions. Similar situations also exist with other macrophyte species.

Your welcome judgments in the past concerning the Galaxia Auratus has now ensured their survival but we believe that a deliberate strategy should now be structured to maintain the lakes at a level which will allow these wetlands to regenerate and life cycles to occur ensuring ongoing survival.

My constituents continue to be disappointed that despite the management plan articulating strategies for the environment there is very little focus (with the exception of the Galaxia) on the health of the wider aquatic floras and fauna communities within these lakes.

Further this is a unique opportunity to address the environmental degradation of the past when clearly irrigation water held within these lakes is not required for at least twelve months other than to increase the bottom line of the principal irrigators through accessing cheaper water supplies.

Yours sincerely

Richard C. Dax
(Chairman)