



NORTH EAST
CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT
AUTHORITY

**Wodonga Kiewa Indigo
Implementation Committee**

29 April 2002

Project Manager – VRHS
Catchment and Water Division
Department of Natural Resources and Environment
PO Box 500
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

RE: SUBMISSION ON DRAFT VICTORIAN RIVER HEALTH STRATEGY

At the IC Meeting of 19/4/02 it was unanimously resolved:

"That this IC believes that in a healthy Victorian River there is a place for a balance between native and exotic plants and animal species."

In support of this position in commenting on the Draft Victorian River Health Strategy we believe the following facts and opinions should be considered.

From the community point of view, which we represent, there is conviction that in supporting the need for environmental flows the draft policy is extreme and does not have community support. While acknowledging the needs of the environment we believe the pendulum has swung too far to the extreme position and that a more conservative position is in line with community expectations.

Without going into detail on the many controversial aspects of the Draft it may be appropriate to give our opinion on the fundamental policies expressed.

"What is an ecologically Healthy River?"

It is defined in the strategy as "a river which retains the features and functioning of a river prior to European Settlement." This definition is totally unacceptable yet it sets the flavor for the whole report.

The **"functions"** of the rivers are now totally different to those pertaining 200 years ago. The demands of a civilized society, of urban living, of food production, of irrigation, of recreation are completely different and it is not only unrealistic but also undesirable to neglect or downgrade these functions expected by present society. Furthermore, to neglect the obvious changes in necessary functions degrades the acceptance of the whole report. Therefore in its present frame of mind the draft is unacceptable.

The dominant **“features”** of many rivers such as the Murray are the engineering control features. The Hume Dam, Yarrawonga Weir etc. Does anyone really suggest that these features should be **“decommissioned”**? This negative attitude permeates the draft and is unacceptable.

“In the river and riparian zone, the majority of plant and animal species are native and no exotic species dominates the system.”

This again is the extreme environmental position which does not have community support. Rather, the community believe in a balance between native and exotic species as occurs throughout modern society.

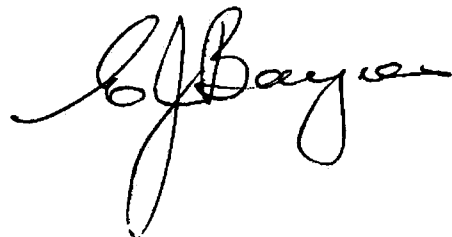
A good example of community attitudes, supported by scientific studies, queries the current obsession with getting rid of all willows. The community believes that in some cases willows can and do cause problems through lack of management and incorrect plantings. However while there is a need for some control there is no justification for the current extreme policy.

In the Arthur Rylah report commissioned for the Kiewa River Stream Flow Management Plan it is stated (p.28) "The current approach of removing large tracts of existing willow stands denudes the river banks and may cause increased erosion and sedimentation" "The removal of exotic willows...requires careful monitoring in conjunction with the establishment of endemic native vegetation." We believe these scientific opinions reflect the views of the community.

If we extrapolate the draft policy to fish and grasses, what do we regard as the future for trout or soil retaining grasses such as kikuyu grass which has proved to have no equal in protecting degraded sites from soil erosion?

In summarizing what could be a very lengthy rebuttal of the draft but confining our opposition to the fundamental philosophy, we repeat our concise comment – "There is place for a balance between native and exotic plant and animal species."

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the strategy.



Ed Baynes
Chairman
Wodonga Kiewa Indigo Implementation Committee