



watershed victoria

Post

Dalyston Post Office Vic 3992

Web

www.watershedvictoria.org

Phone

0407 811 778

Registered Association

AOO52177U

MEDIA RELEASE MEDIA RELEASE MEDIA RELEASE

9th January 2009

MINISTER'S ASSESSMENT – NO SURPRISE

The media release today by the Minister for Planning advising that the environmental impacts of the Bass Coast Desalination Plant are acceptable comes as no surprise. The environment has as usual come last in the decision making process of Government.

Today's media release by the Minister for Planning, "Inquiry Finds Desalination Project Site Acceptable" tries desperately to emphasise the "independence" of the Inquiry and the assessment but repeating the word four times in the first four sentences doesn't make it so!

When the State Government announces it "will build" the plant, anoint their own Department (the DSE) to be the proponent of the project, prescribe a very narrow terms of reference for assessment, assign a Government appointed planning panel to "independently" assess that narrow scope, you get the outcome that you engineered.

Spokesperson for Watershed Victoria, Neil Rankine says that it needs to be understood that this assessment is not on the final designed project but rather, as the Inquiry report itself states it only considered the "Reference Project" as "there is no final project in place, but rather a concept of what the Victorian Desalination Project may include". It must be a first that an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) has been conducted for a "concept" but then gives the go ahead for a project that has not even been designed!

The Ministers assessment report is littered again with motherhood statements to minimise, mitigate and manage environmental impacts but only "where practicable" and in one case the recommendation is "to avoid significantly affecting" impacts on the ecology of moderate relief reef but only "**if practicable**".

Rankine says the report again reinforces the fact that not all the impacts are yet known as it reiterates again the need for more studies and monitoring to be conducted including social impact studies on the local areas affected. Add to this the implementation of monitoring programs, the establishment of a Regional Impact Fund and the recommended augmentation of health services, infrastructure, education facilities and emergency services, you have to ask the question – how much is it all going to cost? It is becoming increasingly evident that the scale of this project will never be achieved for \$3.1 billion.

Rankine says that given the public are paying for this plant through the initial doubling of their water bills then they have a right to know the real and complete costs of this project immediately. Let's not forget that partial privatisation of our water will result from the Private Public Partnership structure that will build and operate this plant and that means that profit to a private company (probably foreign) is an element of the cost we will all pay.



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There are no surprises in the Ministers release today and the EES process and the assessment of a “concept” has been shown to be a farce and the hundreds of volunteer people who actively participated in it to try to make it meaningful have been significantly disappointed and disillusioned by today’s announcement.

END

For more information contact:

Name: Neil Rankine

Vice- President

Watershed Victoria

Phone: *0413 902 571*