



**Dr John Williams' speaking notes on the Canberra launch of  
This Land Our Water**

Date: 24 June 2011

Time: 10.30 AM

Venue: CSIRO Discovery 10.30 AM

## **Introduction to Book**

Two chapters of Introduction and Context by Vicky Cullen.

Some 24 papers set down in 6 sections:

- Knowledge needed to manage water systems
- The big story on water-
  - the issues and
  - acting for the future
- Urban Water
- Water in the landscape
- How to influence policy

With some 36 vignettes from Peter's students and his network of colleagues and friends from Prime Minister, academics, water managers, community leaders and thinkers from all walks of life. All this brings the book alive...for its all about people, place, policy and politics embedded in a layout of beautiful photographs, diagrams, sketches and cartoons.

It's a most attractive stimulating... a must read book for everybody.

## **Content of the Book**

What's the book about? There is a lot about Peter Cullen the man...how he thought...what he said...and ultimately who he was.

*"What made Peter Cullen the man of our time is that he stood up...at great personal cost...to those vested interests intent on destroying what he valued."*

This book has then powerful messages to us from Peter...messages from those very productive last two three years of his life... Peter words are now more relevant today than they were when he first wrote them. If ever there was a time ...it is now when we should

listen to those messages, reflect on them, take action and stand firm to the wisdom he left us and which is laid bare in this book.

He would hate us to eulogise him at these launches while failing to hear his call to act and better manage the rivers he so loved.

Let me lift some of his words from the book:

- *“As a society we have been in denial about climate change for the last decade and we have chosen not to do anything much about it.”p163*
- *“There is widespread agreement that the MDB as a whole is over-allocated but there is no agreement as to what are sustainable levels of extraction.”p151*
- *“While scientists can give us a measure of what we should do with out rivers, the fate of our rivers will depend on politicians having the courage to follow scientific advice.”p12*
- *“The ability to sell water provides a mechanism for adjustment that redistributes water to its best economic use in a national sense...but in a regional sense may provide winners and losers and create social tension.”p195*
- *“We need to measure and manage the whole water cycle rather than selected bits of it and we need to engage with communities to take them along on the journey as we confront on going water scarcity for rural Australia.”p175*
- *“We must help communities understand the changes we are experiencing...help them envisage alternative futures and assist them with the resources and aid the transition...not pretend it will all go away.”p282*
- *“Whose fault is it that in a democracy, a focussed self interest group, will always act in their own interest, rather than in the interest of the whole society? Does this make sustainable management of water resources an impossibility in western democracies.” P294*
- *“Governments must govern rather than retreat to referenda.” P68*
- *“Communities must demand that political leaders take control and responsibility for putting in place management regimes that benefit all of community not just the favoured few.”p300*

The book begins and ends with the words:

*"It is a once in a life time opportunity to develop a healthy MDB. There is much to be done."*

This is so true will we have the courage as scientists, government community and industry have the wisdom and the courage to take up the challenge that Peter left for us in the material collected in this book.

We must if we are to honour Peter at all.

So read the book, get engaged again in the debate and actions that will move our society to managing our rivers, wetlands and estuaries so that we restore ecological function, regain lost opportunities and build a more resilient more sustainable future for all Australians.

Read the book if you love science...or more importantly if you care and love this land our water. It's an inspiring read.

I therefore take enormous pleasure in launching this book...by giving copies to our key sponsors for this event:

- CSIRO
- University of Canberra and
- eWater CRC.

It is launched.

But it is not about Peter, it is all about this land and its water which he loved.

John Williams  
24 June 2011