

2nd ANNUAL WATER LEADERS CONGRESS

25 FEBRUARY 2010

CHAIRPERSON - Dr JOHN WILLIAMS, Natural Resources Commission

- Welcome.
- I am John Williams of the Natural Resources Commission. An independent body that provides the NSW Government with sound, scientifically-based advice for the management of water, land and biodiversity (NRM) that meet social, economic and environmental goals for the State of New South Wales.
- This Congress is taking place at a time when it is imperative that we try to drive progress in water reform (NWI) and water resource management. We have the chance to make a difference.
- At this meeting, we have the people of influence, knowledge and creativity to bring the change we need and to force the solution we need.
- We must not be seduced into a comfortable game of watching and participating in a whole industry talking about water.
- Peter Cullen Trust. We are reminded of this.
- We need instead to think and act to make a difference on how we manage the water better and in light of the critical issues we face.
- It is easy to engage in intellectual exercises about water – about water reform, water management, water security, water delivery, water management strategies, water trading and water market design, etc.
- With growing pressures on our landscapes from climate shifts, variability and climate change, historical over-allocation of water resources in relation with climate sequence – in all this we cannot just settle for more of the same.
- The area of water reform is one of the few policy areas fundamentally important to both urban and rural Australia.
- My recent work on Red Gum Forests and the issues of water illustrated a key issue about what we seem to be doing.

- We are yet to realise that while identification of environmental assets can be important – they cannot be managed as isolated entities. Rivers are a whole system of integrated assets that all have an ecological/hydrological function.
- Managing environmental water is not about irrigating natural habitat. It is about water entering forests and wetlands from the channel and RETURNING to the channel to drive the river function.
- What we have learned is that we need to look very differently on how we manage our rivers and re-think how we manage our precious water resources.
- The question that we face is how do you plan and design a system that provides for extraction for human use but also addresses environmental functioning and the health of the water courses themselves. The key is building a system that establishes resource security for both water user and the environmental assets. Assets are important but cannot be treated as isolated assets – they are connected together.
- We need to look at how over-engineering has focussed on the storage and extraction of water. Now it needs to think about reverse engineering to think how to get the ecological function and flows back to a way which gives life back to the river. Wetlands once converted to storage basins will need attention. Water flooding to forests and rivers are so important.
- So let's use today to make progress and revitalise our efforts.
- Today we have an impressive line-up of speakers that will also deal with a broad range of water issues.
- First off, the Hon. Phillip Costa MP, will deliver the opening address on the State of the Water Industry in NSW. Welcome Minister, it is an honour to have you with us.
- We will then get a stocktake on the Commonwealth's *Water for the Future* program from Dr James Horne of the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.
- Rob Freeman, CEO of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority will provide an update on their progress on the *Basin Plan* and how the work of the MDBA in regard to the management of the iconic Murray River system relates to us all.

- Ian Perkins and Richard Bootle from lawlab will then present legal insights into water trading and give us an understanding of emerging issues in water law.
- After lunch, David Papps from the ACT Department of Environment, Climate Change, Energy and Water is to lead us on a practical depiction of meeting the challenge of climate change through sustainable water management.
- Entitled, “Integrating sustainability best-practice into business management”, Dr Judi Hansen of Sydney Water will share Sydney Water’s experience in managing water supply for climate change and variability.
- Alan Gregory, CSIRO Theme Leader in urban water research will then present a case study that addresses sustainable urban water management, the nexus between water and energy and providing research to support the implementation of State led water strategies.
- Finally, John Ringham, Chief Operating Officer of the South Australian Water Corporation, will present to us on their experience and plans for diversifying supply for future water security in South Australia.
- I am sure you will agree that the Congress today promises to be informative, interesting and productive and will, I hope, lead us all in thinking about a better future in water management.
- First off, I welcome the NSW Water Minister – the Hon. Phillip Costa MP, who will deliver the opening address on the State of the Water Industry in NSW.
- Minister Costa has a long history of involvement in water management, as a former Mayor of Wollondilly Shire on the southern outskirts of Sydney, a former member of the Wollondilly Catchment Management Committee for 10 years and a rural landholder adjacent to Sydney’s main water storage and supply infrastructure, he has first-hand knowledge of the role that water has in the natural environment and for economic and social use.
- As Minister for Water since September 2008, he is at the forefront of the water policy initiatives in NSW – which he will now share with us.