

Statement by Robert Purves in response to articles published in the Weekly Times

I was disappointed to read in the Victorian regional newspaper, The Weekly Times, on the 5th and then again on the 11th August, 2021 that some irrigators are ‘demanding’ that I either sell my shares in Duxton Water or resign as Chair of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists. I disagree that I have a potential conflict of interest. My ownership of shares in a publicly listed company which places value on such an important and limited resource as water (Duxton Water) and my role with the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists are consistent with my longer-term commitment to the health of the environment and my passion for regional communities where I farm.

As the late Professor Peter Cullen used to say, “the solution to Australia’s water challenges has always been to double the profits with half the water”. Water trading is fundamental to doubling the profits by allowing water to trade to its highest use – it is not about speculation. The market has a key role to play in making water available to farmers who can maximize employment and the value of agricultural production in dry years. I agree with the findings of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) report in March this year which stated “Investors provide benefits to water markets. They provide new sources of capital to irrigated agriculture, increase water market liquidity and provide a range of water products which help irrigators to manage water supply risks.”

I have been involved with The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists since its formation in 2002 and am proud of our role at the forefront of water reform which goes right back to the Howard government’s National Water Initiative in 2004.

For many years I have publicly stated that you can’t have a healthy economy without a healthy environment, and you can’t have a healthy farming sector without a healthy water system. Right now, we have so many challenges in agriculture and in regional communities. For me, the dynamics of the water market (irrigators vs environment) is only part of a much greater challenge...climate change.

There has never been a more important time to come together to manage the impacts of lower rainfall and higher temperatures which we are all experiencing because of climate change.

Robert E Purves. AM.

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