

[REDACTED]

My Wife and I are vegetable growers on the Macquarie [REDACTED], just South of Bathurst.

Obviously, we will be directly affected by whatever outcomes are implemented as part of this water sharing plan, as not only our livelihood is dependent on the water that we use to produce food, but also the millions of dollars we have invested into property and infrastructure stand to be lost at the stroke of a pen should the wrong strategy be implemented.

My main concern in this strategy is the influence that Bathurst and Orange councils seem to have in this decision-making process, especially as they are the ones who have the most to gain through securing water in this system.

Both councils are growing the size of their towns unrestricted, generating millions of dollars of profits for themselves through rates, land subdivisions and selling water to residents and businesses etc, all the while placing pressure on the water sources they draw from and doing nothing substantial to shore up infrastructure to support the increasing population.

Why are the Councils allowed to grow these cities to possibly 70,000 – 80,000 people in the next 20 years and create a situation where there will be no water available to food and fibre production?

It should be noted that Bathurst council (and I assume Orange council as well) hold a Water Access Licence (WAL) with the same conditions as every other WAL holder in this region and yet they are allowed unrestricted access to allocations in drought periods when all other WAL holders upstream of Bathurst are severely restricted with no warning and with no thought to the consequences these restrictions place on the mental and financial wellbeing of the WAL holders.

Why should the livelihoods of council, businesses and individuals in towns be deemed as more important than those that operate on the banks of the Windburndale river and Macquarie river?

Why are councils, businesses and Industries in Bathurst and Orange given unrestricted access to water during drought periods while businesses that hold a Water Access Licence are forced to shutdown with no compensation?

At present, the only strategy in place is to take water from farmers with no compensation given so that councils and town based businesses can continue to prosper. Bathurst council has openly stated to farmers in the past that its only concern with regards to water and the rivers is to secure water for the town and themselves, and as such, everything they are trying to do is aimed at restricting other WAL holders from accessing water. Rather than WAL holders upstream of Bathurst having their allocations slashed to support the town, they should be given the option of selling or trading their allocations to Bathurst council or downstream to other WAL holders.

It seems crazy to me that building a bigger dam at Ben Chifley and regulating the whole system is not being considered as a priority strategy.

Again, I believe this is partly due to the influence that Bathurst council and Orange council seem to have in this process.

If a bigger dam is constructed at Ben Chifley then Bathurst Council would have to relinquish control of the dam to Water NSW, therefore it is obviously in Bathurst councils best interest to do everything it can to stop a bigger dam being built and the system becoming regulated. It was not raised during the Bathurst stake holders Teams meeting, but I would be vehemently against any

proposal by Bathurst council to change the Ben Chifley dam “22% dam level cease to pump” conditions attached to our Water Access Licences. As this would be yet another impediment placed on farmers to benefit councils.

Bathurst council are also desperately trying to lock up water from Windburndale Dam for themselves to sell, which, combined with harsher restrictions on upper Macquarie WAL holders and small storm water harvesting projects they hope to avoid losing control of Chifley Dam.

I understand that building a bigger dam at Ben Chifley is probably the most expensive option of all the strategies.

But it is a strategy for the long term survival of the towns and industry in the region.

In its current state, of 30,000ML, Ben Chifley Dam is less than 1/10th of the size of Windamere dam and has a catchment area only marginally smaller than Windamere’s.

Chifley has been at or around 100% capacity with water going over the spill way for the past 2 years with multiple minor to moderate flood events occurring at Bathurst during this period.

Right now Windamere dam is at 100.4%, Burrendong dam is at 124.9%, Warren and the Macquarie marshes have been flooding for weeks.

If Chifley Dam was at least 150,000 ML it is highly likely it would be full and spilling at the moment and the flooding downstream would still be occurring. It is wet times like this that could secure water for years for Bathurst and Orange as well as ensuring water for environmental flows and industry.

In a regulated system down stream licence holders would also benefit from having an extra 120,000ML of storage that could be released down to Burrendong and beyond as required in much the same way as Windamere dam is used to top up Burrendong dam and service the down stream licence holders.

Finally, there needs to be more transparency around yearly allocations to avoid situations like we had in 2019 where DPIE granted upper Macquarie WALs 100% of their licence allocation on July 1st only to have the NSW water minister and DPIE step in at the request of Bathurst council and cut all allocations upstream of Bathurst to 20% on November 1st that same year with no consultation or compensation for affected WAL holders despite many already having crops worth hundreds of thousands of dollars already planted.

Regards

