

Comments to Essential Services Commission in relation to Melbourne Water KooWeeRup-Longwarry Flood Protection District Special Drainage Rates 2011/12

Advisory Committee (or secret society?)

Our first knowledge of this 'advisory committee' was receipt of a letter from Richard Evans of Melbourne Water dated 11 August 2008 inviting nominations.

We are land owners and are significantly involved in the local farming and business community, and on 6 February 2009 we e-mailed Richard Evans of Melbourne Water to ask him for the names of the committee members (together with their contact details and dates of meetings), but he ignored our request. The Melbourne Water website was also searched for this information at that time but without success.

This 'advisory committee' would appear to be appointed by Melbourne Water, with the community having very little input. To our knowledge there have not been any public meetings or information sessions, and no one appears to know who is on the committee, their qualifications, how many 'community property owners' are on the committee, when they meet, do they have minutes of the meetings available for the community to inspect, is it a boys club, or is it restricted to friends of Melbourne Water.

In the last month or two we have also asked our local councilor, Stuart Halligan, as to his knowledge of the existence/nature of this 'advisory committee'. He told us that he has only recently been asked by Melbourne Water to go on this committee.

Melbourne Water and lack of care for the community

We understand that Melbourne Water may have an office in KooWeeRup – although at the moment it appears to be occupied by the 'Ace Alliance'. The door is locked and the blinds are closed.

When there was flooding in the district on February 5 and 6, which was made worse by lack of maintenance by Melbourne Water and the release of large quantities of water from the Tarago Dam, it was left to the CFA and SES volunteers to deal with the evacuation alert, without the benefit of specialized knowledge of the drainage and flood protection system. Neither did Melbourne Water contact farmers and land owners to advise them to move livestock, even though Melbourne Water knew that flood waters were expected to peak overnight at dangerously high levels.

Maintenance work moved from local contractors

We are aware that any maintenance work which is now done is no longer performed by local contractors but by the 'Ace Alliance' – Melbourne Water and the international company Thiess. This work used to be done by local businesses – how many 'Ace Alliances' have Melbourne Water created with international companies to the detriment of local contractors?

Spending on Maintenance

The Melbourne Water price review report appears to provide a mix of current quarterly accounting in Tables 6 and 7 and then historical annual accounting in Table 8 – this means that the report has limited value for a member of the local community as it is difficult to see if current rates are being spent on maintenance.

We doubt that these amounts have been spent on maintenance based upon our personal experience. In June 2006 a mediator was appointed by the Victorian Government to assist in resolving maintenance issues we had with Melbourne Water (because Melbourne Water divert flood water through our land) and a written agreement was signed on behalf of Melbourne Water. However in December of 2010 we had to write to Melbourne Water once again pointing out that they had not carried out the maintenance they had agreed to including flood gate maintenance, erosion control, vegetation control or general repairs. (Neither did they comply with other mediated and agreed matters).

Carrier versus Precept Drains

We have read the Melbourne Water response No. 2 to FAQ dated April 2011 and are none the wiser if our issue is with a 'Carrier' drain or a 'Precept' drain. Or both?

Is a fast flowing body of water up to 200 metres wide and 4 metres deep moving through private grazing land categorized as a 'carrier' drain or a 'precept' drain?

When Melbourne Water once again diverted 2/3rd of the Bunyip River flow through our land via the 'diversion' at Cora Lynn, it was not 'drainage' which occurred, nor was it 'flood protection', but we can now apparently also look forward to paying more for the privilege of having our land flooded in the future, under the guise of a Melbourne Water special drainage rate review. In addition it would appear that we also have to personally meet any repair costs for damage caused by flood water, presumably because our land is neither a 'carrier' nor a 'precept' drain - Melbourne Water have recently declined to pay for fencing damaged by the flood of 5 and 6 February. Apparently it is not a policy of Melbourne Water to meet the cost of repairs caused by their diversion of flood water over privately owned land. How is this equitable?

Request to present evidence of the above to the Essential Services Commission

Documents can be provided to substantiate the above comments, and we would welcome the opportunity of presenting this material in person to the commission.

Denis and Anne O'Mahony