

ATTACHMENT TO AGENDA ITEM

Ordinary Meeting

18 March 2014

Agenda Item 9.8 Submission to Office of Living Victoria Water Bill Reform

Attachment 1 Submission to Water Bill Exposure Draft 447

Greater Shepparton City Council Submission to Water Bill Exposure Draft

The Greater Shepparton City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Water Bill Exposure Draft recently released by the Victorian State Government.

Greater Shepparton City Council recognises the need to reform Victoria's two main Acts that govern the management and use of water – the *Water Act 1989* and the *Water Industry Act 1994*. The continued environmental, social and economic prosperity of our region depends on fair and equitable management of our valuable water resources.

Council supports the changes to the ownership of stormwater, which will enable some urban Council's to store and sell stormwater. Greater Shepparton City Council notes this will not apply to our municipality in the near future.

Council notes no definition is provided in the Explanatory Guide or the Dictionary at the end of the Water Bill Exposure Draft for what constitutes an aesthetic dam, however we are significantly concerned about the possibility of having to licence aesthetic dams if they relate to lakes capturing and treating stormwater. In northern Victoria there are many old watercourses that rarely hold water (generally only during floods or heavy rains) and in urban areas these old watercourses have been utilised for stormwater collection and drainage as part of residential development. In some instances, these also provide aesthetic dams that have proven to be assets for marketing of residential blocks. The licencing of these features will result in extra financial burden to councils such as Greater Shepparton City Council. These areas are handed over to council from the developers for maintenance and enhancing for a number of outcomes: aesthetic, passive recreation and environmental (water quality and wildlife refuge). The financial burden of potential licencing of water in these community assets could lead to a scaling back of this type of stormwater quality treatment.

Greater Shepparton City Council strongly disagrees with the suggestion on page 24 of the Water Bill Exposure Draft Explanatory Guide that the State Government's preferred approach is for local councils to be responsible for implementing water management schemes that include levees. Council acknowledges that this review will not deal with this issue, management of flood levees will be pursued separately to this process, but Council feels it is pertinent to raise the issue now.

There are approximately 170 kilometres of levee banks along the Heritage listed Goulburn River. The financial cost to provide annual inspections and upgrades would be significant to the rural councils the Goulburn River passes through. Councils will be burdened with the requirement to employ extra staff to annually inspect the levees, develop, implement and maintain a tracking and monitoring system and ensure compliance from the public on matters relating to stock and appropriate public access. Council is also concerned at the huge risk it would bare in the case of failure including potential liability in the event of major flooding.

Council requires that, at a very minimum, the levees should be brought up to a safe standard prior to any handover, an objection to handover notwithstanding.

The community of Greater Shepparton is not in a position to meet these costs. The region is in an uncertain period with changing agricultural practices along with intense competition and pressure on many of our industries including dairy and horticulture. To impose these extra costs onto Local Government when focus must be on supporting our community is unjust and unwarranted. Council strongly urges the State Government to reconsider the intent to move the responsibility for levee banks, through the change to water management schemes, onto Local Government.