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## **WATER – A lifeline to Ballarat’s future**

There is no matter of greater fundamental importance to the future of Ballarat and the region around it than the provision of a sustainable water resource for the longer term.

Ballarat is facing a water crisis. This time last year the city’s reservoirs were at 40% capacity. They are now at 26%.

The very substance of the city’s industrial and employment structure is at risk as a result. There are businesses, particularly food processing and manufacture, which rely heavily on a reliable and sustainable supply of water.

These industries are maintaining their commitment to Ballarat and are to be praised for doing so. They are also, to their credit, at the forefront of the debate aimed at securing a reliable ongoing water resource for the city. They are deeply concerned.

The State Government’s Draft Sustainable Water Strategy for the Central Region of Victoria recognises the dimensions of the challenges faced by the Ballarat and surrounding communities in relation to economic and population growth and, therefore, the pressures on water resources.

However, it unfortunately does not define a solution to the problem.

It raises the prospect of a water supply from the Cairn Curran Reservoir, but this is predicated on a range of other outcomes and is subject to further investigation by Central Highlands Water.

It also ignores the possibility of returning all the water from the Lal Lal Reservoir to Ballarat, at least in the short term, to allow the city and region a reliable water resource while other options are being proved up and finalised.

Really, despite the endeavour of the draft report and the obvious implication that the government is determined to find a solution, the prospect for Ballarat’s water supply – without a sudden and substantial change in the weather – is bleak.

Governments must address the matter of water with great urgency and action.

This cannot simply be a matter of one state or one section of one state seeking a solution to its water crisis without consideration for other areas of that state or other parts of the nation.

The Commonwealth needs to have an oversight of what is happening in the supply of water. For instance, the Cairn Curran option proposed in the State Government's draft central region strategy involves water from the stretched Murray-Goulburn region of Victoria (which does not even have its own draft water strategy yet) being diverted further south and west.

There are questions of protecting the environmental values of the Loddon River and ensuring that the levels of service to irrigators along the Goulburn River are not adversely affected.

The Cairn Curran proposal also incorporates the possible purchase of water from farmers.

While all these considerations are taking place, the severe water challenge facing Ballarat and region remains.

The Cairn Curran proposal may ultimately provide the solution for Ballarat's water supply, but at this very moment the citizens of this region must take stock and realize how perilous the situation is.

Tougher water restrictions are sure to be imposed by Central Highlands Water before this summer and I strongly support this. I urge all residents to adhere to them in the interests of the wider welfare of the community. This is a crisis and we must all work together to get through it.

There have even been urgings upon the State Government to begin legislating some tougher, ongoing water constraints to force citizens to respect and respond to the need to conserve this most precious of resources.

There has possibly never been a tougher challenge confronting modern Ballarat than to secure a reliable and sustainable long-term supply of water.

We all want to live well, have secure employment and provide an environment in which more people can come, live, work and invest. It is a great city and region and that reality, now more than ever, needs to be protected and fought for.

It will not be if people do not accept the gravity of the water situation in Ballarat and play their part in preserving this critical resource.

At the same time Governments and their supporting agencies must quickly establish the best water solutions. They must not balk at the tough decisions. They must not play politics with this matter.

The State Government must quickly, but thoroughly consider the responses to the Draft Sustainable Water Strategy for the Central Region, respect those opinions which may not be in line with its own and be prepared to make adjustments to accommodate other views.

There must be goodwill on all sides. This is a critical matter. There can be few greater challenges facing this State now or into the future. There are certainly no greater challenges facing Ballarat and this region.

**Noel Coxall,**  
**Chair Committee for Ballarat and Chair WATER task group**

**6/07/06**