

Hon Jay Weatherill MP  
Premier South Australia  
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Dear Premier,

As a former Chairman of the South East Water Conservation and Drainage Board, I am writing to you in response to your letter of July 8, 2014 which set out a change in direction for the operation of various boards and committees in the State. Your letter also requested submissions which would justify the continuation of boards or committees which members of the public believe offer value and exemplary customer service.

The South East Water Conservation and Drainage Board (SEWCDB) has a membership of seven people, comprised of:

- Three landholder elected members
- One local government nominated member
- Three members selected by the Minister

Four members are male and three are female.

The composition of the Board brings a diverse range of skills and experiences which are used to oversee the activities of the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) staff assigned to the Board to ensure compliance with the objects of the Act. Many of the skill sets of the Board Members do not exist in the DEWNR organisation including project management, engineering expertise, understanding landholder needs and private sector management expertise.

The Board is a very much hands on group, which have though many years of wide community contact built a reputation as a credible organisation which is able to make decisions quickly, fairly and reasonably in order to serve the interests of the landholders as well as take care of important environmental assets associated with the drainage system.


The cost of operating the Board is minimal with sitting fees for Members being less than \$20,000 per year. I consider this represents good value given results achieved and the high level of regard for the Board by the principal beneficiaries.

The Minister is proposing introduction of a levy as a means of ensuring proper funding for the maintenance and operation of the drainage network. If a levy is introduced, retention of the Board will become more critical because the community do not have confidence that levy funds would be spent wisely or efficiently without the oversight of the Board. This concern is justified by the experience of subsuming NRM Board staff in to DEWNR with the promise of lower cost and improved efficiency. In fact, any objective arms' length analysis would show this rationalisation failed to deliver its objectives; indeed, costs and management efficiencies have declined rather than improved.

I consider the ongoing oversight of a carefully selected SEWCD Board would continue to greatly assist the Minister and the Government and ensure that the future activities relating to operation and maintenance of the Board's assets satisfy the expectations of the community. Those expectations will increase substantially if and when a levy is introduced.

Finally, I submit that the functionality of the SEWCD Board together with its staff could be improved markedly by reassigning responsibility for maintenance and operation of the network to a Department other than DEWNR. The principal skills and expertise of the Drainage Board are by nature project management and engineering management. DEWNR has no expertise in these disciplines and I am certain that the Drainage Board and its staff would operate more efficiently and effectively as a part of a Department such as Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure.

Yours faithfully,

  
Jim Osborne

