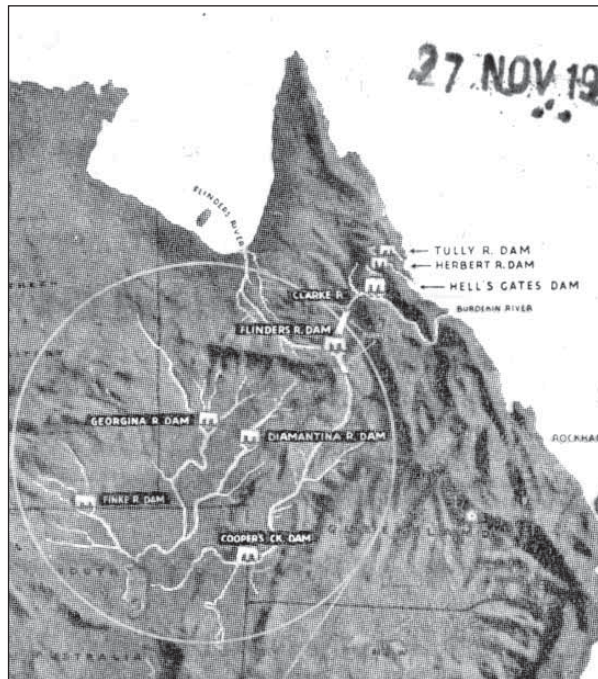


Watering inland Australia

In 2002 a prominent radio commentator promoted the idea that Australia could be 'drought proofed' by forcing some of its rivers to flow inland. Australians have lobbied the government to redirect Queensland coastal waters toward inland Australia for nearly a century. What do large-scale water schemes tell us about contemporary attitudes to the Australian environment?



NAA: A9816, 1943/664, part 1

Watering inland Australia

Ideas for discussion

Read document 1. What is LBS Reid most concerned about?

Read document 2. Why did the Whyalla Technical High School write to the Director-General of Agriculture?

Examine document 3. According to TE Field, what is Australia's 'greatest menace'? Why did he consider it the 'enemy'? What did he think would happen if this enemy were ignored? What does this document tell you about TE Field's attitude toward the Australian landscape?

Examine document 4. According to Darcy Wearns, what were Australia's main objectives in 1958? What is Australia's 'inland problem'?

Read document 5. What was Michael Sawtell's motivation for publishing this pamphlet? What is his opinion of inland Australia? What words and phrases does he use to support his position? Why is the poem by Henry Lawson included?

Read documents 6 to 8. Select a scheme, then illustrate it on a map. In a paragraph, discuss the impact of the scheme on two parties, which could be the environment, farmers, industry or Indigenous people. Speculate on whether the scheme is feasible.

Read documents 9 to 11. Why did the government need a 'standard reply' letter about the Bradfield scheme? What was the Australian Government's position on inland watering schemes?

Reflection

Why have grand solutions, such as flooding inland Australia, rather than simpler solutions, such as water restrictions and recycling grey water, been so popular? What does this tell us about former attitudes to the Australian environment?

Extension

Some people still advocate the Bradfield scheme. Would it be built today? Who would the major stakeholders be? What would the possible ramifications be?



Document 1

Water running to waste

2 DEC

25 Wellington Street
Coorparoo S.E.2.
Brisbane, 26th November, 1946.

THE MINISTER
29 NOV 1946
No. R423/1/2

The Right Hon. J.B. CHIFLEY M.H.R.
Prime Minister
Canberra.

28 NOV 1946

Dear Mr Chifley,

Is it really correct that you made the statement as reported in the Courier-Mail of 23rd November, copy attached? if so your statement about water in North Queensland resembles very closely other statements made about coal in Queensland over fifty years ago. The two cuttings enclosed from the Brisbane Telegraph of 25th November show now that all the statements were incorrect, such statements being made by supposed mining experts. I knew that coal seams existed in the Callide and Blair Athol Districts fifty years ago and that samples had to be brought down to Gladstone by bullock teams for testing by Naval Vessels. Its quality was defined as A.I.

I know that there are billions of cubic yards of water running to waste into the sea from East and West of the Great Divide from St Lawrence to Cooktown every monsoon period. I know that thousands of square miles of beautiful plains are dying in Central Australia for want of water simply because your experts say it cannot be diverted there.

If you, Mr Chifley, have the interests of this Great Australia at heart, I can and will supply you with a scheme showing that this water can be diverted into the Inland and how it can be done.

You have saved Australia from becoming a slave State to Japan. Well, now is the time to prevent it from becoming a barren waste of drifting sand, a second Sahara Desert, in which neither man nor beast can live. Grim drought is on the march and it must be stopped if you wish to save Australia. This can only be done by diverting the flood waters from the coastal rivers into the Inland.

Nature has given us the Mountains, yearly we have the monsoons and periodically we have the great cycles. All you have to do is to instruct your Engineers to divert the flood waters, now running to waste into the sea, back into the Inland. They can do it - they will do it if you will only handle the matter in a similar manner to that in which the private contractors are now supplying the coal from Blair Athol.

Yours faithfully
L.B.S. REID.
M.I.M. & C.E. London

L.B.S. Reid

SECRETARY,
DIRECTOR BY
11

5 DEC 1946

COPY: P.W.R. (CONSDN) (WITH ORIG. ENCS:)

NAA: A461, R423/1/2 part 1

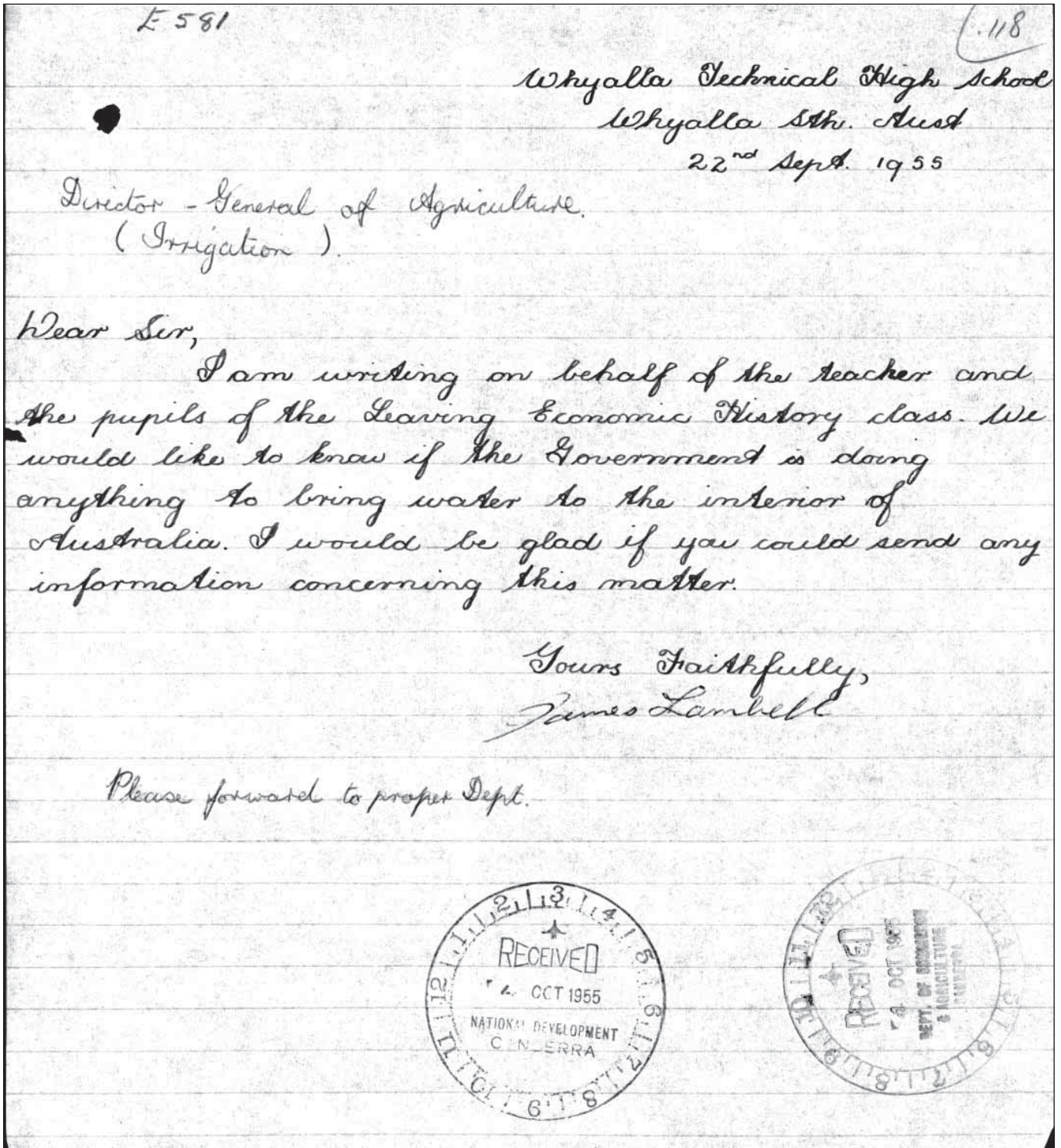
Letter from LBS Reid, Brisbane



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Document 2

Watering the interior



NAA: A987, E581

Letter from Whyalla Technical High School



Document 3

Australia's greatest menace

SYNOPSIS OF ADDRESS TO THE MEMBERS OF
THE AUSTRALIAN WOOL GROWERS COUNCIL
IN MELBOURNE ON 9TH JUNE, 1943.

- AUSTRALIA'S GREATEST MENACE. -

When I say this I am taking the long view, and unfortunately the more I study the outlook and read the records of the past 50 years, the more I am confirmed in my opinion that it is no idle talk or exaggeration to allot to Australia's central desert the title of Public Enemy No. 1.

This enemy is so far away from the ken of most Australians that it is very difficult to make them take any interest in it, but as surely as night follows day, this enemy is creeping forward by the insidious method of infiltration mopping up our heritage and menacing the well being of the country south and east of it, reducing the rainfall and productive capacity of country that today seems too far away from the danger to be affected.

You have all heard of the dying heart of Australia; dying it is, largely due to man's ignorance and cupidity in denuding the country of its cover which Nature, by a process of evolution, has provided during the course of centuries, but which man and rabbits in a short hundred years, have pretty well destroyed.

The heart is very sick, but not past redemption if dealt with quickly, and it is up to Australians if they have any interest in the future of their country to act without delay.

If the position was beyond redemption I should not be wasting your time and mine in forcing this matter upon you, but on no less authority than that of the late Dr. J.J.C. Bradfield, possibly the greatest Engineer Australia has produced, there is a remedy possible, by turning the waters now running to waste through the Queensland Rivers into the Pacific and the Gulf of Carpentaria, back into the old water courses of the Cooper, Georgina and Diamantina, and re-flooding Lake Eyre with fresh water.

Forty to fifty years ago seldom three years passed without the Cooper discharging into Lake Eyre, but, do you realise that this has not happened since 1918, and will never happen again without man's intervention, as the reduced moisture and wind erosion has erected sand ridges across the river bed, which no flood waters can again penetrate.

If the dying heart is allowed to die, then the central desert will continue to creep, as the Sahara and other World deserts have done. (I have read that the Sahara is travelling south forty miles a year, covering even forest country.) God grant Australia will wake up before a similar experience is possible for this Continent.

Extract from an address to the Australian Wool Growers Association

NAA: A705, 134/1/368



Document 4

Making inland areas arable

465 Punchbowl Road, ³⁶
BELFIELD N.S.W.

19th May 1952.

The Honourable J. McEwen M.P.,
Minister of State for Commerce and
Agriculture,
Parliament House,
Canberra, A.C.T.

Dear Mr. McEwen,

I pride myself in being a good and loyal Australian, trying to live, think and act, Australian, in every way, as my forbears have done before me.

It therefore appals me to learn of the continued awful droughts being experienced by "Inland" Australia, brought home more forcibly by the necessity of moving weakened stock from these drought-stricken areas, and the toll of stock losses where such movement is not practicable.

Australia's main objectives these days are firstly, increased production, and secondly, increased population. Strictly speaking, the order of precedence should be reversed; but logically, without increased production, the incentive for increased population will not exist. We cannot continue to increase the population of our coastal belts greatly- there are limitations, particularly for primary industries, by virtue of lack of space.

However, if our Inland areas could be made arable, then not only would population and production increase considerably, but in time Australia could not only become a rival of the great United States of America - if not the World - in industry, wealth and culture, but we could become the World's granary and the greatest Nation and Power.

As a good Australian, I had pondered over this for many years, wondering whether this so-called "desert" in Australia could be reclaimed. However, due to my avid interest in things Australian and my insatiable thirst for knowledge of our great continent, I came across a book which offers the very solution to the 'Inland Problem'. I refer to "The Great Boomerang", by Ion Idriess.

This great Australian has first-hand knowledge of the interior by virtue of his personal experiences therein, and in "The Great Boomerang", he shows his true Australian patriotism; he traces the history of the Inland, describes the conditions and setbacks, and the potentialities when rain - an almost unknown commodity there- and floods (chiefly the latter) roll down the ages old rivers. He does this in 209 pages. From page 210 onwards, he puts forward a plan and even my layman mind can see it as perfectly practicable a plan which without the slightest doubt would turn the "waste" inland areas into habitable, fertile, dependable, productive lands.

Possibly not in our own immediate time, but in that of our children and grandchildren and their children, would the real results be manifest; but we must obtain some benefit even in our time if the plan is put into operation; and we must not consider only ourselves, but posterity, ~~and~~ if our children and ultimate descendants are to live in the freedom, democracy, and comfort which we in our present day are striving so hard to attain. All this, also, must result in a large population, and with it the unlimited powers and resources to defend this grand country against aggressors.

Extract from a letter from Darcy Wearns



Pamphlet – 'Watering inland Australia'

Water

Here is a map that will give you some idea of the great Bradfield-Idriess scheme of water for the inland.



Do you know that it is not that Australia has not the water, but that we do not use what nature has given us.

We allowed 285 inches of rain to run to waste in North Queensland in the year 1945.

This great scheme could supply scores of towns in Central Queensland with light, power and water. It would make possible the closer settlement of 300,000,000 acres and community towns with industries in Central Australia.

There is no reason why almost every river in Australia could not be used for irrigation.

Organise meetings for Michael Sawtell, the Independent Senate candidate, to speak and explain Onward Australia.

Join the Onward Australia League—5/- a year.

MICHAEL SAWTELL
12a Victoria Arcade, Sydney

NAA: A9816, 1943/664 part 1



Pamphlet – 'Watering inland Australia'

Water and Culture

All good Australians will agree that there is a very grave danger of our great land sinking, sinking and sinking down into poverty and chaos unless something is done to save our glorious heritage.

A great ideal is needed to save Australia and to give our people a knowledge of their destiny. Our best known and most loved national poet, Henry Lawson, gave us this very necessary ideal many years ago, when he wrote these majestic words:

THE IDEAL

***"The dream of the poet of the
Southern Cross
Will never be realised
Until the country is IRRIGATED
And the people HUMANISED."***

That means Water and Culture, Australia's two most pressing needs.

Michael Sawtell, one of Sydney's best known public speakers, is standing as an Independent Senate candidate in the Federal election, as an opportunity of explaining and holding up the true ideal of the destiny of Australia to the people.

Our Senators should be men of character and superior education, and able to explain the true meaning and purpose of civilisation to our floundering and materialistic democracy. The true function of the Senate is to raise cheer and to guide democracy. But mere party politics and party politicians are ruining Australia.

Organise meetings for Michael Sawtell to speak and explain this ideal of Water and Culture.

Read *The Great Boomerang* and *Onward Australia* by I. L. Idriess, to learn more about Australia.

Join the Onward Australia League—5/- a year.

MICHAEL SAWTELL
12a Victoria Arcade, Sydney

NAA: A9816, 1943/664 part 1



Document 6

Divert the Murray into lake Eyre

Reg. No. 25.

Translation from French Language into English.

Paris,
28th January, 1956.

Marcel Peyrouze,
21 Rue de la Tour Auvergne,
Paris 9,
France.



To Prime Minister of Australia,
Sir,

I desire to submit to you a project for the deviation of the Murray River towards the central depression of Lake Eyre. The realization of this project would give the semi-desert centre of Australia space for agriculture and pastures and will open the way for economic and industrial expansion of great benefit. At the same time it will be possible to exploit the mineral deposits of the centre of the continent and change the climate of this huge region through the augmentation of the degree of humidity produced by the creation of a vast lake that will fill the central depression.

To realise this project it will be necessary on one hand to establish a weir with the materials at hand locally, i.e. earth, this weir will be situated before the township of Morgan. On the other hand a deviation must be dug, which will level the existing line between the Murray basin and Lake Frome. This deviation will be dug between Flinders and Barriere Mountains.

I put myself at your disposal for the realisation of my plan which could be done very rapidly if you give me sufficient manpower and machinery.

I am the author of similar plans in the union of South Africa, Egypt, and French Sahara.

In the hope that my project will interest you, I send you my respects.


(Signed).

NAA: A987, E581

Translation of a letter from Marcel Peyrouze, France



Document 7

Channel from Spencer Bay to Lake Eyre

Joseph Holibal
Külföldi-telegraphia
IV. Arpad u. C. 20.
Hungary, Europe.

Budapest, 2nd December 1933.



Dear Sir,

I have an idea to make a channel from the Spencer Bay to the Lake Eyre being with 12 meter under the surface of the Ocean. I think this channel would serve to the traffic of the land of the Eyre, by it the Lake would become a lake of permanent water and surface resulting there a milder climate and permanent ground water. It would be a big chance for the unemployments of the Commonwealth and of course a useful investment.

Because I have here no topographical map of this part of the world and if the idea would please you so I beg you to be so kind as to send me any map and I shall make the plan of this channel. If you had no map of this also I do gladly the surveying of the channel alone.



I am,
Sir,
Your obedient servant
Holibal József
Civil Engineer

NAA: A461, R423/1/2 part 1

Letter from Joseph Holibal, Hungary



Document 8

Canal from Port Augusta

6, Rae Street,
RANDWICK.
February 9, 1935.

F. H. Stewart, Esq.,
Hon. Minister Labour and Industry,
Kissing Point Road,
DUNDAS.

Dear Sir:

Having in mind the necessity of providing work for the army of unemployed and seeing that there is considerable opposition to the standardisation of Railway guages I thought I would venture to you a suggestion which has been running through my mind for some years, and, to my way of thinking, would be a great national advantage to Australia if it is practicable and could be carried out even though it took a decade or two to complete.

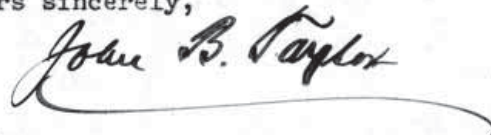
The centre of Australia is below sea level. It has occurred to me that if a canal could be cut from Port Augusta to the centre of Australia, and there are lakes which could be linked up, viz., Lake Torrens and Lake Eyre, it would flood the centre of Australia and instead of it being a barren waste we could have a lake there with water communication all the way. The very fact of water being in the centre of Australia would induce a greater rainfall than we get at present, and, water communication with that particular portion of our Country would, I think, be most advantageous to us and to the generations to come.

I do not know whether this scheme would be possible, but, as you have at your disposal the means of ascertaining whether it would or not I thought I would send the idea along to you for what you think it might be worth.

Should you see fit to investigate the possibility of the project I should be very glad if you would let me know whether or not it is practicable.

Wishing you every success in your efforts.

Yours sincerely,



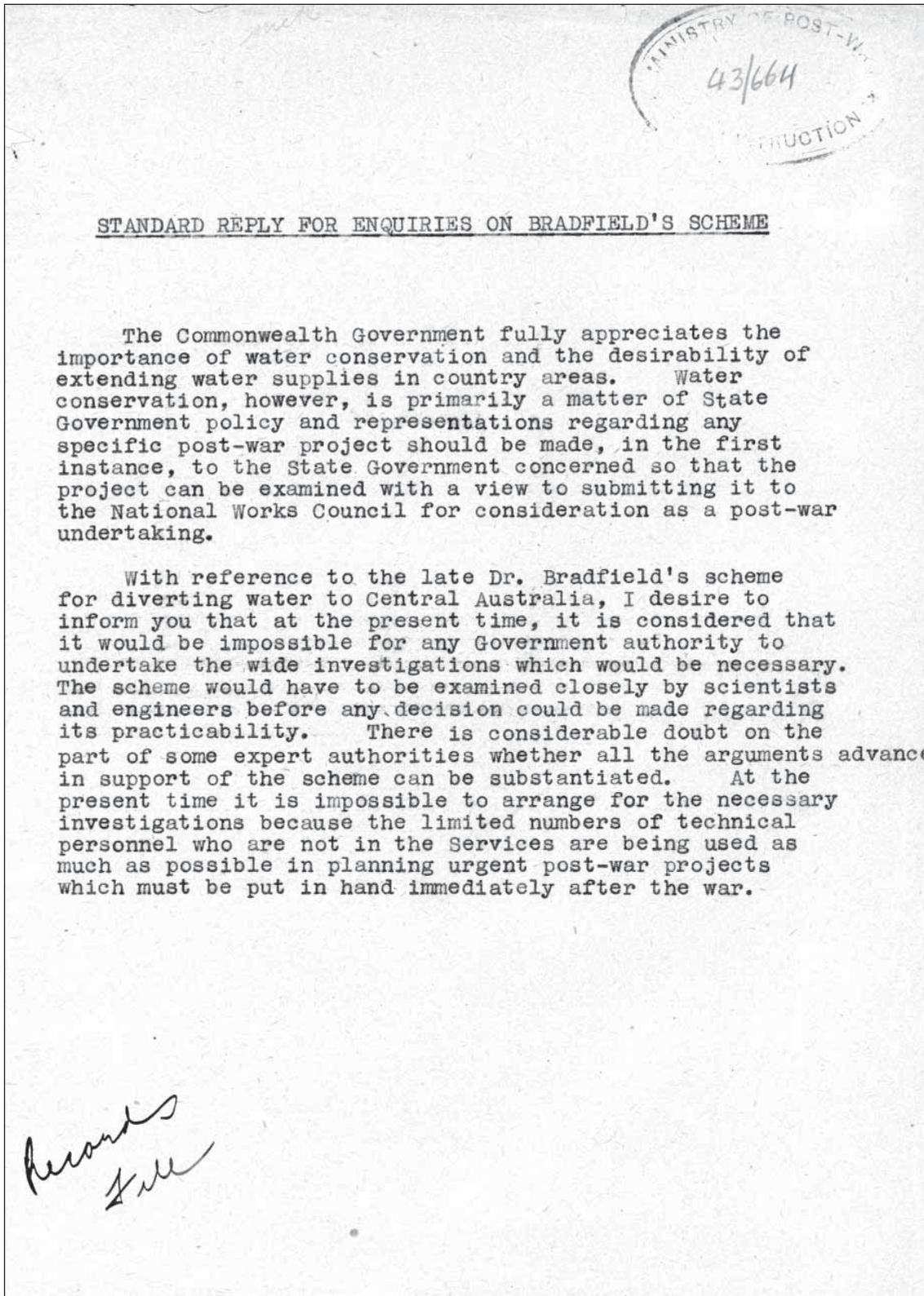
Letter from John B Taylor, Sydney

NAA: A461, R423/1/2 part 1



Document 9

Inquiries on the Bradfield scheme




Standard reply of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, c1945

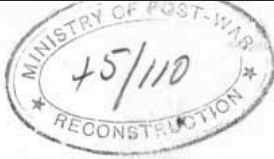


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Document 10

Impracticality of the 'inland sea' idea






P/D.
C.S.O.999/1921.

Premier's Office,
Adelaide...

30th April, 1945.



Dear Sir,


With reference to your letter of the 3rd instant regarding the filling of Australia's "inland sea", I beg to advise you that the Deputy Engineer-in-Chief reports as follows:

"The question of constructing a channel from the head of Spencer's Gulf to Lake Eyre has been raised on a number of occasions during the last 50 years. The evaporation rate at Lake Eyre would amount to at least 6 ft. per annum after it had been converted to permanent water (at present it is much greater) and from a report furnished in 1921 it will be seen that from the area of 3,740 square miles of Lake Eyre, without taking into consideration losses from the low lying country around the fringes of the lake or from the channel itself, over 600,000 million cubic feet of water would be required annually for evaporation, a quantity nearly twice as great as the average annual discharge of the River Murray.

A channel large enough to carry this quantity of water annually, and deep enough to give a gravity flow from Spencer's Gulf to Lake Eyre, would with modern equipment cost in the vicinity of £250,000,000.

The main reason put forward for proposals of this nature is that the maintenance of an inland sea would greatly increase rainfall in the arid interior of the Continent; but that such an increase would take place is extremely doubtful. It needs only the most cursory study of the Australian coastal area to show that the mere proximity of so large a body of water as the ocean itself does not ensure a high rainfall on the adjacent land.

I have perused Appendix IX of the report referred to in the letter of 3rd instant from the Director General of Post-War Reconstruction, and am in general agreement with it, particularly with the first and last paragraphs."

Yours faithfully,

(M.A.P. Pearce)
Secretary to Premier.

→ Records
F/A
R/S 31/5

Dr. H.C. Coombs,
Director-General of Post War Reconstruction,
P.O. Box 168, CITY,
CANBERRA. A.C.T.

NAA: A9816, 1945/110

Reply to HC Coombs, Director-General of Post War Reconstruction



Document 11

Question in parliament on the Bradfield scheme

Suggested Answer to Question asked, without notice, of Prime Minister by Mr. Duthie on Thursday, November, 14, 1946.

No Royal Commission has been set up to investigate the Bradfield scheme. The proposal has, however, been the subject of investigations by a number of existing authorities including Queensland State authorities, the Rural Reconstruction Commission, an expert Committee under the chairmanship of the Director of Meteorological Services, and finally the Northern Australia Development Committee.

The late Dr. Bradfield's proposals have been investigated from a hydrological and meteorological point of view, and it would appear they are not practicable. The hydrological investigations, which have been carried out by the Queensland State authorities, indicate that the figures of cost are too conservative while the estimates of water discharged at the distributing end are much in excess of what would actually be available.

A detailed examination of the meteorological aspects of the scheme was made in November 1944 by an expert committee, under the chairmanship of the Director of Meteorological Services, whose report deals with the influence of the proposed reservoirs or lakes upon the rainfall of the interior of Australia. The majority of opinion was that -

- (a) no material increase in the rainfall of the regions concerned is likely to accrue from the implementation of Dr. Bradfield's scheme, and
- (b) the climate of the regions concerned is unlikely to be materially affected either immediately or ultimately.

NAA: 1943/664 part 1

