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Hon. Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
4 Harvest Terrace
West Perth WA 6005


Dear Mr Swinbourn,

Petition No. 138 – North Wanneroo Water Rights

Thank you for the opportunity to make a short submission in support of the abovementioned petition, which opposes any water licence allocation reductions or charges for water to farmers and landowners in the North Wanneroo area.

I certainly see merit in the complaint that the proposed reduction in water allocation by 10% will result in an unnecessary level of economic hardship for the farmers and horticulturalists in the area, and has the potential to further devalue their properties, and risk the economic downturn of a significant portion of the regional economy. Indeed, these same risks were tacitly acknowledged by the Government when it released the WA Planning Commission's "The Future of East Wanneroo: Land Use and Water Management in the Context of Network City" report.

Implementation of all of the recommendations contained within that report, including the creation of small-lot rural subdivisions on the less agriculturally viable land to the west, and then allowing for the transfer of a portion of the current western water allocation across to the more sustainable businesses in the east, will require the agreement and coordination of a number of different ministries, including Planning, Water, and Agriculture, and it is my hope that the Committee will recommend that one Minister take overall responsibility for delivering an outcome for local residents. The lack of a coordinated, all-of-government response to date has, I feel certain, been one of the most frustrating factors for the petitioners and other local residents.

As a libertarian, I would eventually like to see us reach a point at which the owners of licences can trade all or a portion of their allocation, as easily as they can any other legal possession in their keeping. It is possible to initiate a trade now, but the system is overly cumbersome, and bureaucratic, including a requirement for ministerial sign-off in each and every case.

Long term relief for the farmers and horticulturalists of Wanneroo may well come in the form of the Water Resources Management Bill, but since that has yet to be tabled in Parliament, it should not be beyond the Government to take short term, local steps to ease the specific complaints outlined in the petition, to allow for the consolidation of water licences, the rezoning of Carabooda-Nowergup Valley, and the removal meantime of any threat to cut the present water allocations to properties in the area. It is my hope that the Committee will see the merit in such an approach, and will make its recommendations accordingly.

I look forward to reading the Committee's report and recommendations in due course.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Hon. Aaron Stonehouse MLC
Leader, Liberal Democrats WA
Member for South Metropolitan Region