



Save the Nature of the Kimberley

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Ord Stage 2 – at what cost?

The proposed expansion of the Ord River Irrigation Area should not proceed if the costs will be largely borne by taxpayers and the environment, Environs Kimberley (EK) said today.

EK's Freshwater Campaigner Dr Gary Scott said: "We welcome the fact that the WA Government has seen fit to delay its decision on the expansion of the Ord Project into the M2 Supply area. Hopefully this will give time for cool heads in government to fully consider the total costs and benefits of the Ord project to date and what future costs may arise".

"The Carpenter Government should begin by commissioning a full cost-benefit analysis on the first stage of the Ord Project, which, after all, was propped up for decades by generous government funding courtesy of WA and other Australian taxpayers" (and this despite initial Commonwealth misgivings about the viability of the project)¹.

"Now both the Commonwealth and the WA Governments are in danger of taking us 'back to the future' by contemplating spending even more taxpayer money on the proposed expansion. Given the history of this project and the vast economic and environmental challenges facing irrigated agriculture in Northern Australia, this could well end up being money poured down the drain. The 1950s vision of a densely populated agricultural nirvana existing somewhere in Northern Australia was never realistic and should be dispensed with".

"Moreover, given the current economic problems faced by the sugar industry in the Ord, a new Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should also be required before any expansion goes ahead. The original EIS, approved in 2002, detailed a project made up primarily of a sugar crop. An expansion based on other crops will invariably make different demands on the local environment in terms of pesticide and herbicide use, water demand, rising groundwater tables and potential weed problems. It was therefore extremely disappointing that, as recently as February, the WA Environmental Protection Authority granted an extension of the current environmental approval for Ord Stage 2 until 2012".

"We also urge the WA Government to keep its current ban on the growing of genetically modified (GM) cotton firmly in place", concluded Dr Scott.

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1. "It is, after all, your business...It is one thing to feel reasonably satisfied that certain commodities can be grown under irrigation. It is, of course, quite another to determine whether they can be profitably grown". *Prime Minister R.G. Menzies to WA Premier David Brand, 24 August 1959*. By the early 1990s it was estimated that over \$500 million of public money had been spent on the project.