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At the 7th September Public Consultation meeting in Wodonga I raised the need to make 'water availability' the key challenge and issue for the E.P.A.

In the summing up of concerns from the various tables, that got transposed into 'water quality' - it must be altered to be 'availability'.

Australia has no more water fall on it now than fell when there were 350,000-or-so Aborigines. Now we have 25-million people all competing for the same amount of water. It is unsustainable.

Our Great Artesian Basin is severely (some scientists say 'critically') depleted, other artesian basins are running dry - already one basin from which Alice Springs draws its water is empty and another severely depleted. Throughout the outback water authorities began capping bores several years ago to either reduce or completely stop useage. Nowhere do we get enough rainfall to replenish them.

It is a permanent, not transient situation. I see the necessity of the EPA and Water Authorities working together to educate us into using less water and also our Federal and State Governments into limiting population growth - give migrants safe haven until their own countries are safe to return to.

We live on a dry continent - only 9% of our total land mass is naturally arable and we've built our cities and industries on that green fringe down the whole of the eastern coast and the south-west tip of W.A.

90% of Australia is unproductive and cannot be made productive because of lack of water. Watering saline country makes it saltier.

Over millions of years nature evolved plants and animals in our 90% desert country to survive and provide limited food for limited population. We 'improve' production by getting rid of that native flora and fauna replacing it with exotic vegetation and animals. We've cut down nearly half of our forests and wonder why droughts are more common. Often our 'improvements' make the situation worse.

No weather station in Australia reports less than 200mm average rain a year so we're not the driest land, but we haven't enough rain to sustain our increasing population and water useage.

This is all fact. So is the statement we cannot survive more than a few days without water. So 'water availability' is the most important challenge and issue, far more so than 'water quality'.

One table expressed concern about the number of kangaroos - I recall a study which showed that one kangaroo eats the same amount as 8 sheep - and sheep dig out the roots to eat so the plant can't grow when it has rain. We should be farming, not shooting, our native animals because no matter how severe a drought the natives survive.

The E.P.A. faces huge challenges and must try to meet them - the future of our human population in Australia depends on its wisdom, determination and courage.

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Victoria has huge tracts of arid land and everything written above applies to it too. We've removed natural vegetation which has become 'salt' country. And to worsen it we're irrigating and much of that land being irrigated will become saline too. Work with nature, not defy it.