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11 Banksia Tce
South Yunderup 6208

Friends of Rivers, Peel .Inc

15 July, 2010

Submission to

**To The Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Deep Sewerage in the Cockburn Area**

My Name is Colin Elton and I am the Chairperson of a community group known as Friends of Rivers, Peel Inc or For, Peel.

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Our submission addresses items 3, 4 and 5 of the committee’s terms of reference.

Ref 3 Whether there has been any delay in progressing the infill Sewerage Programme and any issues arising from such a delay, including cost,health,social and environmental issues;

Urban areas that had been scheduled to be connected to the infill sewerage system have been deferred as a result of budget savings targets set by the WA Government in 2009. One area that is close to one of our precious rivers has been deferred until 2013.

It is a well documented fact that nutrients from septic tanks find their way into our ground water putting our health and the environment at risk.

This statement is supported by the following documents which we can provide copies of:-

(a) From the water corp. web site 12/03/04 under Environment and Community: - “We have to get rid of septic tanks”.

“What is happening underground? Now we know a lot more about the effect septic tanks have on the environment .For instance, in the process of breaking down house waste water a septic tank and its leach drains allow a high volume of nutrient rich liquid to return to the soil. The volume of nutrients is too great to be consumed by the surface plants and eventually finds its way into our precious groundwater, puts our health and the environment at risk”.

“Every home should be connected to the sewerage system”.

(b) From the “Thirteenth report of the STANDING COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS AND STATUTES REVISION in relation to a PETITION CONCERNING COMPULSORY CONNECTION TO THE SEWERAGE SYSTEM 13 June 1996 section 3 under Recommendations.

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‘The committee was persuaded by evidence provided by the Health Department and WAWA that septic tanks are a cause of groundwater pollution of sufficient significance to warrant compulsory connection to the reticulated sewerage system. The committee acknowledges that there is some scope for the future use of septic tanks and other on site alternatives where they are appropriate. However in urban areas, reticulated sewerage is generally the system least likely to be deleterious to both Public Health and the Environment. For this reason the committee supports compulsory connection to the sewerage system.

Under section 5 Conclusion Para 2 page 19

While the committee acknowledges the importance of these concerns, there is much greater concern at stake in relation to the sewerage system. **The protection of Perth’s groundwater resources and the environment must take precedence over economic questions.**

The committee consisted of Hon MD Nixon MLC

Hon AJG MacTiernan MLC

Hon BM Scott MLC

Ref 4. Similar sewerage issues in other areas:-

The residential area known as Murray Bend (Ravenswood) or in Water Corp terms Murray 2A on the banks of the Murray River was to be the last area to be connected under the current infill sewerage scheme. This is as quoted by Ms Danganzo from the Water Corp to The Peel Inlet Advisory Committee meeting on the 18th of February 2009. As a result of financial cutbacks this area has been deferred until 2013. This area of approx 50 houses is located on the banks of the Murray River and during winter with high rainfall events and high river levels the septic systems back up. Because of the cost involved in pumping out a septic tank (approx \$1000) the residents have purchased their own pumping systems and have taken to pumping out their septic tanks and leach drains into their back yards and onto surrounding vacant land.

This not only creates an obvious health problem for their families but is also a major environmental concern due to reasons stated previously.

From the WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN for the RIVERS and ESTUARY of the PEEL-HARVEY SYSTEM-PHOSPHOROUS MANAGEMENT November 2008.

Section 4.1.4 page 35

The poor health of the Murray River has been identified locally as a significant environmental concern and the impact of nutrients and bacteria leaching from conventional septic systems has been identified as a key contributing factor. Unsewered areas seem to have a big impact (17 percent of winter load) and septic tanks have been identified as one of the primary sources of phosphorous of urban phosphorous export.

Zammit et al., (2006) demonstrated that full connection to the infill sewerage should bring a reduction of 22 percent of the total loading to the estuary. The Murray catchment showed the greatest predicted reduction of 27 percent.

Governments both state and federal continue to spend large amounts of taxpayer’s money on trying to halt the ongoing degradation of our precious water ways and restore areas that have been damaged by previous damaging practices. How is it that some government departments can continue to spend

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on these projects when another cuts back on a project that can have a major impact on the environment and public health?

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