

The Infrastructure Road to Recovery

Great Water Projects

1. The Fitzroy River



In flood, the Fitzroy's water volume is second only to the Amazon. It has an annual runoff of 8 million megalitres; metropolitan Sydney uses one-half million megalitres a year, by comparison. (A megalitre is 1 million litres, the volume of an Olympic-sized swimming pool 1 metre deep.)

2. The Ord and Victoria Rivers



From Prof. Endersbee's testimony to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services, April 1999:

I was recently in Kununurra as guest of local governments in that region, and had the opportunity for aerial and ground inspections of the Ord and Victoria River regions. After my inspection I suggested to the Councils that they should plan on the basis of the integrated development of both the Ord and Victoria River irrigation areas, and should also consider the possible inclusion of the Daly River irrigation areas. The combined developments would greatly enhance the growth opportunities in the entire region.... At the present time the Ord Project is operating well at Stage 1. The continuing development of horticulture is leading to higher returns. The next major stage is Stage 2, and detailed planning is now in

An evaluation by Prof. Endersbee: "The Fitzroy in flood is by far the largest river in Australia, and at the height of the monsoon season it is really quite an enormous river. And it floods over the lower flood plains below the Fitzroy crossing. There it rushes through gorges upstream of these plains, and there are really narrow,

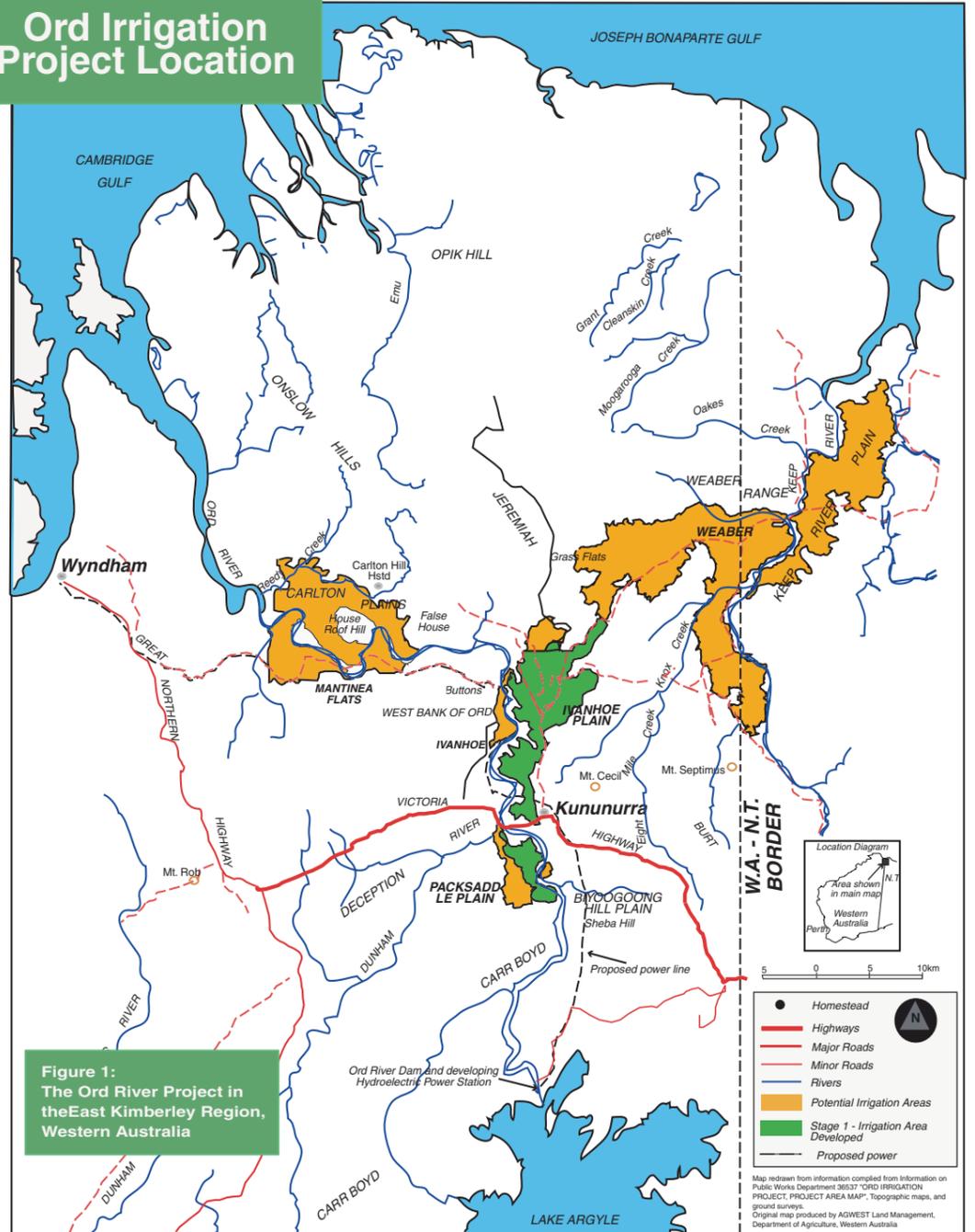
excellent sites for dam building. And dam building is rather easy because the river virtually dries out in the winter. And so I have been proposing and talking to the Western Australian government about this, and I have been suggesting to them that above the Great Sandy Desert, that I think I could develop at least a half a million acres of

irrigation, and this is probably one of the best sites in the world for major, highly mechanised, intensive horticulture. You can design it as a massive project. Anything smaller is uneconomical, really. The Fitzroy could easily support two or three or even five million people."

Estimating the project on a smaller scale in 1997, WA Senator Alan Eggleston said the Fitzroy Scheme would take 10-15 years to develop, and it would provide direct employment to 3,000 people and 7,500 indirect jobs. While in Opposition, ALP WA Premier Geoff Gallop opposed the scheme (and probably still does), as did Kim Beazley and the federal ALP.

hand. With completion of Stage 2 and increased emphasis on horticulture, the overall potential of the Ord is possibly five to eight times greater than the present level of output. On the other hand, nothing has been done whatsoever to investigate the potential of the nearby Victoria River. The potential for irrigation is probably equal in magnitude to the Ord....The combined potential of the Ord and the Victoria could be 10 to 16 times the present output of the Ord, which would make it one of the great irrigation regions of the world. The new port of Darwin and the new rail to southern markets enhance this potential. The combined projects would fully justify the construction of a new rail connection from Katherine to Kununurra, and also the improvement of roads for road-trains to the east via Mt. Isa. I have also proposed the consideration of a new ferry terminal at the mouth of the Victoria River, which would be in easy trucking distance for all farms in the region. I think the new railway from Katherine to Kununurra should be put in hand immediately, with completion at the same time as the Alice-Darwin railway. The Ord irrigators could readily plan to substantially increase sales to southern markets via that railway. The new railway service will create a new demand, and the resulting freight volume could readily rise to one train each day for a large part of the year. This would be of major benefit to the Alice-Darwin railway.

Ord Irrigation Project Location



Water expert Prof. Lance Endersbee has recommended that the Ord and Victoria Rivers be developed in combination, on a vast scale; the Daly River has significant potential, as well. This could be one of the greatest irrigation projects of the world, right on the doorstep of Asia's huge and rapidly growing population centres.

3, 4. The Daly, the Roper, and the Gulf of Carpentaria Rivers



Prof. Endersbee: "Going further east [from the Ord/Victoria scheme] there is the Daly and the Roper Rivers, they also have potential. I've recently been in the Gulf country, there is a huge runoff into the Gulf of Carpentaria, in this monsoon season. And on the range, between the Gulf and the eastern coast of Queensland near there is the Atherton tablelands, and the rivers that flow towards the gulf from the Atherton tablelands, flow through fairly deep gorges, on their way to the plains and the Gulf [the Mitchell, Staaten, Gilbert, and Norman rivers]. There are a number of sites there where it would be possible to have major dam sites and reservoir storage. The Flinders River, is one of the largest rivers and there are good dam sites there, we can store water

to about 500 metres. Now the level of the land over a good contour, in most of Western Queensland, and Central Queensland is about 200 metres. So if we can store water at 500 metres, in the Upper Flinders, we've got 300 metres to play with. The level of the water is 500 metres. So that gives us a fairly significant head, that is available to help pumping. And you go south from the Flinders River, south from Hughenden in Queensland. There are absolutely vast areas, where there is irrigation potential, good soils and there could be a fantastic variety of crops. Now the potential of the Flinders River, could easily support several million people, the volumes of water are just so great. And we've got these irrigation areas. Once again the problem is access to markets. If you join up all of those projects together, if we have an interconnecting railroad, virtually going from Broome right across the top, and towards Mount Isa, and then South, and across to Hughenden, we would pick up all of those irrigation areas, and it would be possible to ship food, and food products out via Broome, or out of Darwin. The potential is absolutely enormous, its

fantastic in investment terms. The problem is, that the magnitude of monies involved is so great, that everybody takes fright and it is not possible for them to look at it as an investment, on a cost-benefit basis. But that's not how you should look at it. It is a national project, like the Snowy."

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