

OFFICIAL REPORT

OF THE

**COROWA**

Water Conference,

HELD IN

THE SCHOOL OF ARTS, COROWA,

ON

WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, and FRIDAY,  
2nd, 3rd and 4th APRIL, 1902,

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF

The Murray River Main Canal League.

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Berrigan :

GEORGE HAMILTON, PRINTER, "ADVOCATE" OFFICE, CHANTER ST.

1902.

# INTRODUCTION.

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## ORIGIN OF THE CONFERENCE.

The movement which brought about the Corowa Conference originated at Berrigan, in 1898—soon after the publication of Colonel Home's report. A deputation was appointed to wait on the New South Wales Minister of Mines, Water Supply, and Agriculture—Mr. Young—and urge the weiring of the Murray at Bungowannah, the construction of the storage reservoir above Albury, and the cutting of a huge canal across Southern Riverina, as recommended by Mr. H. G. M'Kinney, then engineer-in-chief of water supply in New South Wales, and endorsed by Colonel Home in his report. The Minister promised that officers of the department should inspect and report, and at this stage the question seemed to come to a standstill. In November last Messrs. Gorman and E. D. O'Dwyer made a rallying tour through Riverina, visiting Clear Hills, Urana, Daysdale, Burradoo, near Corowa, and Savernake, advocating the Conference at Corowa. The Murray River Main Canal League was established at Berrigan, with the following office-bearers:—President, Mr. E. J. Gorman; vice-presidents, Messrs. G. F. Simpson and E. D. O'Dwyer, with Mr. T. F. Kelly as secretary. The question has also become one of interest on the Victorian side. The Riverina men never once presumed to seek these privileges for themselves alone, they fully and freely invited Victorians to join in, get the works constructed, and share the water. When the Berrigan League got to work they decided to convene the Corowa Conference, and issued circulars to public bodies in the States concerned, and the replies received reveal how great and unanimous is the desire of the people to conserve the waters of this noble river, and insure the land against drought and disaster.

## AN OLD AGITATION.

In 1885 Mr. H. G. McKinney pronounced in favour of the Bungowannah weir, a storage above Albury, and the now much-talked-of main canal through Southern Riverina. In 1897 Colonel F. J. Home, R.E., C.S.I., a distinguished officer, was brought over from India by New South Wales to report upon the water conservation question, and he endorsed the recommendation made by Mr. M'Kinney in 1885 to construct a weir at Bungowannah. In 1900 Mr. John M'Gregor, of the Victorian Water Supply department, published his report in favour of a weir on the Murray at Bungowannah, a storage reservoir at Talmalmo, above Albury, and the great 300-mile long channel, via the Goulburn weir, to the Mallee.

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### THE SCHEMES OUTLINED.

The gaugings of the Murray at Echuca in the 1870 flood showed that the volume of water rolling to the sea past that point was equivalent to the summer flow of the Nile,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million cubic feet per minute. Another authority asserts that at Morgan, in South Australia, 3,700,000 cubic feet of water is the maximum flow per minute of the Murray at that point. The volume, of course, is here increased by the inflow of tributaries like the Murrumbidgee and other rivers, but the quantity registered corroborates the gaugings cited from Echuca. In a scheme of conservation the object would be to store the enormous amount of water now running to waste in the flood season. The Murray is in hilly country as far as Albury, and the last spur of rock—in the Jindera Ranges—is at Bungowannah, some six or seven miles below the border city. It is partly due to the rocky spur at this spot that it has been selected as a weir site, a point on which all the professional experts are agreed. This weir, it is estimated, could be constructed for £100,000—vide Mr. M'Gregor's report of 1900—Victoria and New South Wales dividing the cost. For the storage reservoir above Albury two sites are indicated, one at the Murray gates, which would impound the water solely in New South Wales territory, and the other at Talmalmo—fifty-two miles up the river by road from Albury. Here, by erecting a comparatively low dam, about 1,400 ft. in length, a huge storage of 11,000 million cubic feet would be provided, and Mr. M'Gregor's estimate for this work is about £300,000. As land would be submerged in both States, the expenditure would be a joint one. These are the undertakings which the resolution to be submitted at Corowa prays shall be carried out as national works.

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### THE AVAILABLE SUPPLY.

According to Colonel Home's report, investigations at Albury, extending over a period of seventeen years, ending with 1896, had shown that the main canal on Riverina side could be supplied, and a quantity of water equivalent to 700 cubic feet per second, could be kept going down stream, with the assistance of a storage reservoir of 8,000 million cubic feet capacity in the driest year. The Talmalmo reservoir, Mr. M'Gregor computes, would hold 11,000 million cubic feet, so that the river would be ample to supply the needs of both Riverina and Victoria, the quantities

suggested by Mr. McGregor being 40,000 cubic feet per minute each diverted on either side of the Bungowannah weir. It will, of course, be recognised that it is not proposed to attempt to irrigate the whole of the large areas through which the channels pass. Stock and domestic supplies will be a first consideration, and the average landholder will be content if he can irrigate a few lucerne paddocks to keep his stock thriving in the dry season, whilst those whose land is not irrigable will be able to purchase fodder near home, instead of, as is happening at the present day, having to scour Victoria to secure chaff and hay at famine prices to provide sustenance sufficient barely to keep the flocks and herds alive.

### THE RIVERINA CANAL.

The main canal from Bungowannah through Southern Riverina was recommended by Mr. H. G. M'Kinney in 1885. As will be observed, the accompanying map shows that the canal commences on the New South Wales side of the weir, and continues across country to a point north of Deniliquin. This canal would command a tract of country bounded on the south by the Murray and Edwards, and on the north by the Moulamein creek. The length of tract from east to west is about 110 miles, and the total area 2,810 square miles. From this (says Colonel Home) must be deducted about 280 square miles occupied or masked by a granite outcrop, between the town of Berrigan and the Murray, leaving a net area of 2,530 miles, or about 1,620,000 acres, available for irrigation operations. The soil in this tract is excellent, and much of it has already been cultivated. The preliminary surveys of the Murray main canal have been carried out as far as Berrigan, from Bungowannah, and the character and adaptability of the land for irrigation purposes greatly impressed the New South Wales engineers. On the north side, Conargo and Wanganella could be fed, and on the south Tocumwal and Deniliquin. The townships of Berrigan and Finley would be provided for. The delivery of water on the land by gravitation, according to Mr. M'Kinney, could begin about forty miles above Berrigan, and from that town onward it would be possible to send it over the whole district. It may be mentioned that the rate of fall proposed for this canal is 9 in. per mile, and this has met with Colonel Home's approval. In a paper recently read by Mr. H. G. M'Kinney before the Royal Society in Sydney, that gentleman explained, in order to carry the proposed supply—1,300 cubic feet per second—with this rate of fall, and with side slopes of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 1, and a depth of full supply of 7 ft., a bed width of about 68 ft. would be required. The canal must follow the margin of the low ground from Bungowannah till it reaches Howlong; from there it is carried along the depression known as Twelve-mile Creek till the depth of excavation becomes moderate. Even by adopting this line, says Mr. M'Kinney, it is impossible to avoid deep cutting for ten or twelve miles. This will be the most costly part of the whole scheme. When the canal emerges from the deep cutting the rate of fall right on to Berrigan is much greater than would be safe for the channel, and it is proposed to construct six drops or weirs across the canal in the length of thirty miles, ending at Berrigan. It is calculated that at each drop 340-horse power will be developed, or over 2,000-horse power for

the six drops. This, in time, would possibly provide for the establishment of big manufacturing industries along the canal near Berrigan.

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### THE VICTORIAN CANAL.

The Victorians have had an eye on the Murray waters, and in 1900 Mr. John M'Gregor published his report, embodying a big scheme for supplying the Mallee country with water for stock and domestic purposes from the Murray. This scheme the Railways Standing Committee is at present enquiring into. The canal, as shown in the map, will take off at Bungowannah, traverse the country parallel with the North-Eastern line, cross the Yarrawonga branch line between Tungamah and St. James, also the Dookie-Katamatite line about Yabba, continuing thence on to the Goulburn River, entering that stream above the weir, between Nagambie and Murchison. Thence it will be diverted through the western main offtake at Goulburn weir into the projected Waranga storage basin, whence it will be conveyed by a continuing channel right over to the Mallee, the large canal terminating at Brim. Between the Murray and the Goulburn it will be necessary to cross the Ovens and Broken rivers, and from Goulburn weir to Brim the Campaspe, Loddon, and Avoca. Mr. M'Gregor's estimate for this work is £2,346,464, and if taken in hand immediately it could be constructed within four years. Of the 40,000 cubic feet per minute diverted at Bungowannah, 25,000 only will go on to the Mallee. The country along the Murray, comprising Tungamah and Numurkah districts, is looking for an irrigation supply out of this Bungowannah scheme, and if the Victorian Government provided storage on the Buffalo River, erected a weir across the Ovens at the head of Oxley Plains, and constructed an 80 ft. dam on the Broken River, midway between Benalla and Mansfield, at Nillahcouthie, where a storage greater than the Yan Yean can be obtained, there would be an abundance of water to meet the full demands of the land between the Murray and the Goulburn (all taken from Murray tributaries entering that river "below" Bungowannah), and a huge surplus to pour into Waranga basin to supply the Mallee for stock and domestic purposes.

## DELEGATES.

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The following delegates signed the roll, and represented, at the Conference, their respective districts or associations:—Mr. E. J. Gorman (chairman), President of the Murray River Main Canal League; Alfred D. Randall (Cohuna), J. H. M'Coil, M.H.R. (Echuca), E. D. O'Dwyer (Savernake), John M'Gregor, C.E. (Water Supply Department, Melbourne), John Blair (Berrigan), R. Bloomfield Rees (Swan Hill), D. W. Williamson (Executive Committee of the Central League, Bendigo), John Wallace (Loddon League), Geo. Gordon (Shepparton), John Meiklejohn (Water Trust, Numurkah), J. F. Bedwell (Katunga Irrigation League), Harold P. Whitty (Berrigan), J. N. Smith (Chairman Irrigation Trust, Renmark, S.A.), A. Roper (secretary Renmark, S.A.), J. M'Laughlin (Mahonga), C. Carty Salmon, M.H.R. (Board of Directors, A.N.A.), Rev. Wm. C. Hose (Corowa), Wm. Clark (Gordon Shire League), John S. Christie (Numurkah A. P. Society), H. G. M'Kinney (Sydney), John G. Gray (Kentucky), A. A. Piggin (Corowa), J. Tilley Brown, M.L.A. (Shepparton), John Langtry (Finley Farmers' and Progress Association), Geo. Adams, J.P. (Kerang), W. A. Clifton (Lovesdale), Geo. Reynoldson (Berrigan), W. Kirkland (Finley Irrigation League), Geo. Graham, M.P., Geo. M'Lellan (Clear Hills), — Clayton (Tarramia), G. H. Willis (Corowa), M. C. M. Crockett (Yarrawonga Shire Council), John Ross (Kinross, Germanton), David Reid (Howlong), Tapham Forge (Echuca A. and P. Society), R. M'Kee (President Echuca Shire Council), P. Doherty (Echucâ), B. R. Wilson (Mayor of Echuca Borough), Geo. Evans (Deniliquin Municipal Council), L. M. Burge (Shire of Waranga), R. W. Holmes (Deniliquin Farmers' and Settlers' Association), John Gilmour (Tungamah Shire Council), Ewen Macdonald (Nathalia Agricultural Society), P. J. O'Donnell (Kerang Shire Council), G. L. Wilson (Goonambil), W. W. Killen (Bull Plain), Thomas Forge (Merton, Corowa), John Cullen, M.P. (representing Waterworks and Irrigation Trusts Association), J. W. Gregory (Cobram), J. D. Norman (Wagga), R. M'Geoch (Kilyana), — Blackwood (Hartwood), Mr. Stuart Murray, C.E. (Victorian Water Supply Department).

# FRIDAY, APRIL 4th.

## THE CHAIR.

The Right Honorable Edmund Barton, Premier of the Commonwealth, took the chair at 10.30 a.m. There were also present the following gentlemen:—Hon. John See, Premier of New South Wales; Hon. A. J. Peacock, Premier of Victoria; Hon. J. H. Gordon, Attorney-General, South Australia; Mr. B. R. Wise, Attorney-General, New South Wales; Mr. Chanter, M.H.R., Chairman of Committees, House of Representatives; Mr. J. C. Watson, M.H.R., leader of the Federal Labour Party; Mr. Cameron, M.L.A., Chairman Standing Committee of Railways, Victoria; Mr. E. H. Wade, M.L.A.; Mr. Gilchrist, secretary Standing Committee of Railways, Victoria; the Hon. B. S. Bird, Treasurer of Victoria; Mr. Morrissey, Minister of Agriculture, Victoria; Mr. Skewes, private secretary to Premier of Victoria.

## PRESENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS.

The President of the Conference, Mr. E. J. Gorman, together with Mr. Geōrgē Reynoldson (mover of the first resolution), Mr. E. D. O'Dwyer (mover of the second), Mr. W. Kirkland (in place of Mr. Meiklejohn, mover of the third), Mr. J. H. McColl, M.H.R. (mover of the fourth), and Mr. R. B. Rees (mover of the fifth), then waited in deputation upon Mr. Barton, and the Chairman said:—

Mr. Barton, Mr. See, Mr. Peacock, and Mr. Gordon. On behalf of the Corowa Water Conference I beg to introduce this deputation to you for the purpose of presenting the five resolutions that have been considered and carried at the public meetings of the delegates from three States, held here during the past two days. Before presenting the resolutions, in my capacity as Chairman of the Conference, I would like to say a few words expressing our thanks and gratitude to you for your presence here to-day. (Applause.) We, the promoters of the Conference, recognised from the first the importance of the water question to the whole of Australia, and felt it to be our plain and simple duty to invite you—the leaders of the Commonwealth and the three States interested, to attend the Conference. (Hear, hear.) We recognised that the matter had gone beyond mere local movement, and that if anything were to be gained it should be taken up higher into the realm of Federal or State control. We therefore extend to you our heartiest thanks. (Cheers.) You have paid us a very high compliment, and we feel assured that you will give this great matter your earnest consideration, and do all in your power to further the aims of this Conference. The movers will now in turn present to you their respective resolutions, which I have no doubt will explain themselves. Throughout this Conference a national spirit has been abundantly manifested, and we trust that now we have adopted those resolutions they will be found worthy of your earnest consideration. (Cheers.)

Mr. GEORGE REYNOLDSON then presented the first resolution, which read as follows:—

“That the Governments of the Commonwealth and the States concerned be urged to co-operate in preparing and carrying out a comprehensive scheme for the utilisation of the waters of the River Murray, which, while improving the navigability of that river, will also provide for the imperative needs of the residents on both banks in the conservation and distribution of its waters.”

The mover said: Mr. Barton and honourable gentlemen: At the request of the Conference I herewith tender our first resolution for your consideration. As the Chairman has said, it speaks for itself. We have no doubt that you will make yourselves well acquainted with the terms of the resolution, and that when you have conferred together you will return and say that you see the way clear to comply with the spirit of the resolution. (Hear, hear.) So far as the Conference is concerned, the resolution has been carried unanimously. Delegates from the three States attended and discussed it: I need not impress upon you the laudable earnestness exhibited by these delegates, who have come such great distances, many of them, to try to assist, even in small measure, the great States and the greater Commonwealth. (Cheers.)

Mr. E. D. O'DWYER then presented the second resolution, which read as follows:—

“That owing to the urgent necessity for a scheme of water conservation for the Riverina, Northern Victoria, and South Australia; and, as an instalment of a comprehensive scheme, the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia be asked to empower the Federal Government to provide storage reservoirs on the Upper Murray, and a weir at Bungowannah, as proposed by Mr. McKinney and endorsed by Colonel Home and Mr. McGregor, such head-works to be national.”

The mover said:—Mr. Barton, Mr. See, and Gentlemen: As one of those keenly interested in this great question from the beginning, I have extreme pleasure in presenting the second resolution for your consideration. As you will see, the words ‘urgent necessity’ have been made the key-note. This district has for some time past been, and now is, in great need of water, and the subsequent loss, whilst the river waters are running in waste to the ocean, touches the interests of not only the suffering districts, but also the States and the Commonwealth. (Applause.) We have experienced the value of conserved water through the history of other countries and our sister State, and have taken this decided action in the hope that we may secure your attention and interest. We first thought that our own State could do the work, by constructing the proposed weir and head-works, but having discussed the matter here for two days, we have arrived at the conclusion that any exercise of parochial ideas will but tend to the disintegration of the States. (Hear, hear.) We, the people of Berrigan, have done all we could to minimise the danger of such, but if a fight occurs it will in some respects be a good thing, since it will liven up the country. The people are quite ready for the work. That which we have here propounded we do not bind ourselves to, but express the hope that whatever you in your wisdom think best, then that best shall be done. (Cheers.) We recognise that now the Commonwealth is over and above all,



and recognising this we also recognise the Commonwealth's power and right to take over the whole control of the waters of the Murray and other rivers of Australia. (Hear, hear.) That spirit, which has been displayed so remarkably at this Conference, is the beginning and the end of the whole movement. (Cheers.)

Mr. W. KIRKLAND then presented the third resolution, which read as follows:—

“That contingent upon the above resolution being adopted by the Governments concerned, this Conference recommends the public bodies interested to approach their respective Governments and request that the distributing works for utilising the Upper Murray storages and Bungowannah weir be commenced at such time as will enable them to be completed concurrently with the head-works named.”

The mover said:—Mr. Barton and Gentlemen: You will perceive that this third resolution points strongly to the sentiment of the second resolution, the “urgent necessity” for the work. (Hear, hear.) The one resolution is practically a corollary of the other. That urgent necessity we have personally experienced, and therefore ask the Governments to take immediate steps to deal with it and prevent its recurrence, thereby benefitting the States and the whole of Australia. (Cheers.)

Mr. J. H. McCOLL, M.H.R., then presented the fourth resolution, which read as follows:—

“That in the opinion of this Conference, the circumstances of Australia demand that all natural waters, not already appropriated under legal sanction, shall be declared public water and made, subject to a suitable system of law, applicable to the whole of the continent, and that the Commonwealth and State Governments be respectfully asked to consider such legislation as will provide for its regulation and disposal in such manner as shall secure its fullest possible use in the interests of the whole of the people.”

The mover said:—Mr. Barton and Honourable Gentlemen: I have endeavoured to show by this resolution that it is not only necessary to construct works to conserve and utilise river waters, but that it is also necessary that a proper system of law be established to deal with such matters. This peculiar work demands peculiar laws. With the exception of certain existing laws in Victoria and New South Wales, nothing has yet been done in the direction of according us an Australian system of law, we at present all working under the common law of England, which is anomalous, because whereas there the law is mostly applicable to navigation and water power, here it should be mostly applicable to production. The whole circumstances are different. This Conference believes that it is quite possible for the five States of the Commonwealth to combine together and through their law officers construct laws to suit the circumstances. It is imperative that existing rights must be respected, and one primal law is required empowering either the Governments or the humblest resident to use the waters, secure against rich neighbours and adverse laws. The latter, feeling absolutely secure against interference, could thus hand down the results of his industry to his family and for all time to come. (Hear, hear.) We desire no monopoly in this matter, but the recognition that everyone may use the waters, secure in his right. (Cheers.)

Mr. R. BLOOMFIELD REES (Swan Hill) then presented the fifth resolution, which read as follows:—

“ That the Federal Government be requested to collect data and have permanent surveys completed with a view of constructing weirs and navigation locks in the River Murray with the least possible delay.”

The mover said:—Mr. Barton and Gentlemen: In presenting the fifth resolution to your consideration, you will see that it involves a new principle. In it we recognise the authority of a certain body in dealing with the waters of the River Murray, namely, the Federal Government. (Applause.) From what we have learned, it is impossible for the State or States concerned to deal with the waters of the Murray. (Hear, hear.) There are too many conflicting interests, and, perhaps I may be permitted to say, certain jealousies, for that to be practicable. We therefore hope that the different States interested will recognise the one authority, as we do. (Hear, hear.) Then comes the corollary portion of the resolution. It is all very well to talk of constructing weirs and storage reservoirs, but there is a great and immediate need for their initiatory work. (Applause.) The terrible droughts of recent years in the Riverina and Northern Victoria have been responsible for much suffering and enormous losses, which to be recouped demands immediate action. (Hear, hear.) It is absurd that great volumes of water should be running to waste whilst the land thirsted and the stock perished. (Hear, hear.) The affected area is equal in extent to many of the smaller states of Europe, so it will be seen that this is a big work, and as such demands proportionate expenditure, including the question of navigation, by locking the Murray from Echuca to the ocean. So far as inland waters are concerned, navigation is practically a thing of the past. With our railways we need no canals. But the pendulum of time is swinging back in the old direction. River navigation will never wish to compete with railways, it will rather be a handmaid of them. (Hear, hear.) Therefore when is considered the question of water conservation for stock and irrigation, it is also necessary to take into account the question of conserving the navigability of the River Murray and its tributaries. (Cheers.)

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#### THE PREMIERS' REPLY.

The Prime Minister, States' Premiers, and the South Australian Attorney-General then briefly replied.

Mr. BARTON said it could not be expected, before the Premiers had had an opportunity of consulting their Cabinets, that they would commit their Governments to anything more than matters of broad principle. They could not even do that unless they had some preliminary conversation on the subject. He understood the delegates to be anxious that whatever was done should be done by the co-operation of the Commonwealth and the States concerned. (Hear, hear.) The Federal Government, however, attached a great deal of importance to the question, and it would not be in favour of any scheme which would prevent a just and sufficient quantity of the river waters being made available for navigation—a matter which was under its control. The traffic

must be increased by the increased productiveness of the areas along the rivers. (Cheers.)

Mr. SEE said that originally he had not attached as much importance to the matter as it demanded, but he now recognised the importance of the Conference, which by the way was not the outcome of the action of any one Government; and he recognised also the good work that must result. (Hear, hear.) He had come to learn, and, like Mr. Barton, he would not commit himself before he had consulted his Cabinet. Any paltering with a question of this kind would defeat its own object. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. PEACOCK merely said that the representatives of the different Governments should at once confer and report their deliberations to the Conference.

The deputation then withdrew.

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### AFTERNOON SITTING.

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The President of the Conference took the chair at 2.30 p.m.

#### MR. BARTON'S REPLY.

The Right Honourable Edmund Barton, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, who was received with long-continued cheers, said:—Mr. President, Gentlemen, and Members of the Conference.—It is my opinion that a great deal of the discussion which might have taken place at this Conference has been saved by the wise action of the representatives of the three States primarily concerned, namely, Mr. See, Premier of New South Wales; Mr. Peacock, Premier of Victoria; and Mr. Gordon, who is with us as representing the Government of South Australia, in the unavoidable absence of the Premier of that State. We have, during the afternoon, listened to such able and notable addresses that it is not necessary for me to speak at any great length, but merely to address myself to the resolutions now before the Conference. When you left the hall this morning, the State representatives and myself stayed behind, and, at the suggestion of Mr. See, conferred together upon the resolutions as they had been submitted to us. It was my opinion, at that time, that my presence was not required, but that the representatives of the States alone should confer amongst themselves. Later on my opinion was agreed to. I have to report that this private sitting remained some time in conference, the outcome of which was the passing of a resolution approving of the appointment of an engineering authority of high standing in each State to enquire into and report upon the best means of conserving the waters of the River Murray, both for the purposes of irrigation and navigation. The report of this commission would also include the opinions of the commissioners upon the different schemes submitted to, and discussed by, the Conference since it had been sitting. So you will see, Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen, that definite action has already been taken, in a line that, I am quite sure, cannot fail to be acceptable to all members of the Conference. Before anything definite could be done in the matter, an enquiry amongst

the Governments concerned was the first necessity. This was the first step to take, and no one can say that more should have been done up to the present stage. It is a highly commendable step, and one that cannot fail to approve itself to the members of the Conference. (Hear, hear.) I feel sure that I am speaking the voice of all my colleagues in the Commonwealth Government when I say that the movement will have our hearty support, and that I sincerely trust it will be the beginning of a great success. (Cheers.) I desire now to briefly place before you a few facts as to the constitutional position of the matter as it affects the Commonwealth, and by this means the Conference will the more fully appreciate what is to follow. As perhaps you know, the Commonwealth Government holds the power to control legislation on trade and commerce between the States, which includes navigation between two or more of those States, which, in turn, embraces the shipping traffic. A clause of the constitution expressly allows for this, and it refers to internal navigation as well as external. Furthermore, by the constitution the Commonwealth Government is specially forbidden to accord favour over one portion of a State to another, or over one State to a second. Legislation upon trade and commerce must religiously avoid these preferences. In any case, where one or more questions hinged upon the primal question of navigation, the Commonwealth Government is, above all things, bound, by its constitution, to consider the desires and wishes of the respective States, to whom is entrusted sole control in all matters pertaining to irrigation. In other words, to act by analogy, and to deal with all such matters in a manner calculated to preserve the relationship and the right of all the States concerned. (Cheers.) The report of the commission to be appointed might show a way by which the interested States can act in concert, without it being necessary for the Commonwealth Government to put its legislative powers into operation at all. This is a matter for further consideration. This much is certain, that the Commonwealth has not the slightest wish to arrogate any power to itself, or in any way interfere with the affairs of the respective States, and it is only at the express invitation of the States themselves that such work will be undertaken. (Hear, hear.)

Regarding the questions of navigation and irrigation, I look upon them as bound up indissolubly one with the other. (Hear, hear.) They may be benefited, or they may be hindered; so it is of the highest importance that there should be complete understanding between all the parties concerned, so as to ensure justice and satisfaction all round. It is perfectly clear that no one State can hope to execute such a work without the co-operation of all the States concerned, and it is this fact which causes me to fear that there will be more or less of collision and conflict between them, in apportioning to one another their respective shares in the waters for the land, and their flow for navigation purposes, questions which have cropped up during the present Conference, and will do so again and again. Thus you will perceive that the situation requires and demands the wisdom, the moderation, and the good sense of the Commonwealth and the States alike. (Cheers.)

To summarise, you may be sure that the Commonwealth will not obtrude between the separate States unless asked to do so, in which case it will not resist the call. In such a contingency

the Commonwealth will not be found laggard, but will be ready and willing to give its best services. (Cheers.) The Commonwealth's power in such matters is by no means unlimited, as will be seen by a perusal of the 100th section of the Constitution Act, which demands that irrigation and navigation must have equal consideration in this great and magnificent undertaking, and shows that the Commonwealth Government is bound down, by its own constitution, to do justice to all. (Hear, hear.) The true power is of the State, and no earthly thing, except an amendment of the constitution, can take it away. Every true, patriotic Australian must, in his heart, desire to see such a work carried out, it matters not in which portion of the Commonwealth he resides. (Cheers.) The two questions, navigation and irrigation, are not by any means incompatible. The means of carriage would be of no use whatever unless there were something to carry. (Hear, hear.) To two of the States the question of irrigation is of vital importance; whilst to the third it is not, perhaps, of so great significance, yet enough so to interest it very closely. (Hear, hear.) The spectacle of a great river such as the Murray, confined entirely to navigation, whilst the country through which it flows is starving for want of irrigation, would be a ludicrous one if it were not for the wide-spread suffering and loss occasioned by the want of the water, the use of which would prevent it. (Cheers.) Certainly, irrigation will more or less subtract from the river's flow; but, with conservation, both purposes will be served, and this fact shows the necessity of the matter being dealt with in one comprehensive scheme. (Hear, hear.) Wherever the scheme emanates from, all must agree that there is a better chance of its consummation under single than under divided authority. (Hear, hear.) If the Federal Government and the States' Governments were to stand on their respective rights, the chances of success would be remote indeed. Friction would be probable on the bare facts of the constitution alone. Not that it or its makers are to be blamed, but compromise is very often necessary in any walk of life. In the present case there will not be much difficulty in arriving at a practicable solution of the problem, because three of the States have so far agreed to the work, and so soon as certain political difficulties are removed, consummation becomes possible, and this much I can assure you, that none of my Ministry will place any political difficulties in the way. (Hear, hear.) How these inevitable difficulties are to be removed must be the subject of serious consideration. To my mind, the best and most reasonable way would seem to be the placing of the whole question in the hands of a single authority which would be of an impartial character. It has always been the desire of the Federal Government to ensure the working of the constitution by able and trustworthy men, with one single desire to serve Australia in a just and patriotic manner. (Hear, hear.) This is the spirit that will solve every difficulty. (Applause.) The Commonwealth is bound down by the laws of its constitution, to the extent that it is legally unable to transfer its authority respecting navigation to the States or to any other authority; but, on the other hand, the States may, if they so desire, remit their authority respecting irrigation to the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth can have no other interests at heart than the interests of the States. (Hear, hear.) I might here make mention of

Mr. Gordon's speech, eighteen months ago, at the Conference in Adelaide, wherein he strongly urged that, in a country such as Australia, naturally, the question of irrigation was of considerably greater importance than it was even in America, and emphasised the necessity of seizing every opportunity and grappling with the question, not as put forward in different schemes by different authorities, which could never ensure success, but carried out by one united authority, which is the main argument adduced in connection with the present scheme. (Cheers.) I do trust that you will go on as you have commenced, without that jealousy of which there has been too much in the past. Let me impress upon you not to relax your efforts as soon as the present drought breaks up, as perhaps it will some time or other—(laughter)—as has been done before, putting the question aside as soon as the rain falls, and letting the whole subject drift away. It has always seemed to me to be a characteristic of Australians to be indifferent and light-hearted. In prosperity they forget the dark times of suffering and loss and peril, and put aside the necessity for finding a preventive against their recurrence. (Hear, hear.) I venture to say that we are all thoroughly in accord with the question of irrigation, providing the respective rights of all concerned are preserved. We must not wait for another drought, but get ready for it, so as to be able to bear it when it does come. (Cheers.) If it is our desire to utilise this great territory to the best advantage, and to the advantage of our sons and our sons' sons, then it behoves us to lay up great stores of water during the times of plenty, and in the times of scarcity expend it in perennial distribution. (Cheers.) I hope that I have not spoken too long upon this question, which interests me, as a private citizen, apart from its national significance to me as the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth. Believe me, I feel deeply interested in it, as a great internal question of Australia—the question of the conservation and utilisation of river waters. (Cheers.) It is a question that has received scant recognition in legislation of the past, yet it should have been one of the first—(hear, hear)—the first in the laws of the country and in the thoughts of the people. (Hear, hear.) It becomes us all to take to our hearts the lesson taught us by past experience in loss, and pain, and suffering, to prevent a repetition of such, and to build upon our past difficulties and dangers a happy and a prosperous future. (Loud cheers.)

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#### MR. SEE'S REPLY.

Mr. John See, Premier of the State of New South Wales, who was received with loud cheers, said: Mr. President and Gentlemen,—After this Conference adjourned this morning, the representatives of the three States entered into a smaller Conference, though one, perhaps, not less in importance than this one. More than this, at the present stage of the proceedings, the representatives could not do. The outcome of the Premiers' Conference was a resolution which I can assure you will be carried into active effect at once. (Cheers.) Had we gone back to our respective States, and merely taken your resolutions with us, nothing would have been done. As it is, a commission will be appointed immediately. Before addressing you further, I must

congratulate the Conference upon having succeeded in throwing life and vigour into this great question, which, in the past, has been too much overlooked. (Hear, hear.) An inter-State Commission, with Sir William Lyne as chairman, has sat before, but there was no outcome of it, principally owing to the fact that one of the States, South Australia, was not represented there, and imagined that the other States wished to make capital out of her absence. I fear that that spirit is more or less prevalent now, instead of the policy of consideration and conciliation. For instance, Mr. Gordon is, I am afraid, labouring under the misapprehension that it is the desire of New South Wales to do something of a drastic nature, but I can assure him that it is not so. (Hear, hear.) There is no wish on the part of New South Wales for self-aggrandisement, and I can, with all confidence, say the same of Victoria. (Hear, hear.) In reality, to show that the State of Victoria had actually anticipated a common agreement between the States, she has drawn off large quantities of water for the purposes of irrigation and, in my opinion, at any rate, deserves credit, and not blame, for the action. (Hear, hear.) When the gentlemen who shall be appointed to the commission meet and prepare all the necessary data, it will then be for the Ministers of the States interested to put it into a concrete form, and then for the Parliaments to consider it, and make it legislative law. In this work, I do not think that the States will clash, but will act harmoniously together for each other's good. (Cheers.) To a very great extent the old days of parochial jealousy have passed away. (Cheers.) We most keenly compete for the rights of our several States only when they concern the rights of the people. (Hear, hear.) I can assure the Federal Government that in this great and universally important matter we shall not, in any way, strive to combat and frustrate their desires. (Hear, hear.) It is a highly-gratifying fact that the Prime Minister agrees so cordially with the resolutions submitted by the Conference, because it smooths the way for an amicable settlement of the whole question, a question than which I know of none more important, as commanding and demanding attention. (Cheers.) The members of this Conference may rest assured that the preliminary work will not be delayed further than is necessary, but, at the same time, such a great work as this must be commenced well—or, better, not at all—else we will perhaps, in the future, find out, to our cost, that we have started at the wrong end. (Hear, hear.) I regard the resolution which has been unanimously adopted in private conference, as a practical and business-like outcome of the Conference, up to its present stage, and if I be in power at the required time, you may rest assured that I can be relied upon to accord it the recognition its great importance warrants, and, if there be any defects, on having them put right. (Loud cheers.) Personally, I am sanguine and confident as to the issue, believing that it will be favourable to all concerned. (Cheers.) I must again compliment the Conference as a thoroughly practical and not a theoretical one. It has not been a failure, but a very great success. (Cheers.) You have revived a great question, which, although in abeyance, has not altogether been lost sight of. Parliament is always busy, but in future it will not be so busy that this question will be overlooked. (Cheers.) The matter will be dealt with in a thoroughly practical and energetic manner. So far as I am

concerned, not even a visitation of floods will delay the issue. (Cheers.) In conclusion, I desire to compliment the fighters against this terrible drought. Providence has done a very great deal for mankind; it becomes mankind's duty to also do a great deal to put to practical use the advantages the Almighty has placed before us. (Loud and continued cheering.)

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#### MR. PEACOCK'S REPLY.

Mr. A. J. Peacock, Premier of the State of Victoria, who was also received with loud cheering, said: Mr. President and Gentlemen,—I feel keenly the responsibility of being a public man. I have as sympathetic a heart as any of my severest critics, and I feel very keenly the sad tales that have been told regarding the condition of the country. We would be false to the trust imposed in us by the people if we did not rise to our position, and do all in our power to grapple with, and overcome this frightful difficulty. (Cheers.) Some seventeen or eighteen years ago a Commission was appointed by Sir William Lyne, in New South Wales, and a simultaneous one by Mr. Deakin, in Victoria, and it was unfortunate that the State of South Australia had no commission at that time. The separate Commissions afterwards met together as a joint commission. Nothing was done. In my opinion, in matters such as this too little recognition has been given to South Australia in the past. She has rights equal to ours. (Hear, hear.) We are proceeding along the only practical way, and we would be false to our positions if we deceived you. We will secure the information that should have been secured long since. My express instructions to my Government, and to the members of the Commission, will be to the effect that there must be no delay in this matter. (Cheers.) In this respect, I am sure that I can also speak for Mr. See and Mr. Gordon. (Hear, hear.) It is not to be interfered with by any other work. We shall have much necessary information almost at once, and then we shall know exactly what the scheme is likely to cost. We have made many mistakes in the past; we can now profit by them. (Hear, hear.) If there be any delays I shall lend my voice and influence to have the work transferred from the three States to the Federal Government—(hear, hear)—because I know that the temper of the people would speak and say: "A plague on your Houses! Transfer the matter to the Federal Parliament." If such a contingency arise, I, for one, shall not object to the transference. (Hear, hear.) We must recognise the fact that settlement is being seriously affected by these adverse climatic conditions. The country is going back. And all the time tremendous bodies of water are running to waste. Those on the land call for the most serious consideration. We must fight to retain population; we must also fight to extend it. (Cheers.) I feel certain, within my own mind, that all who sit here to-day may go back to their homes confident in the ultimate successful issue of this great and important scheme. (Loud cheers.)

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#### MR. GORDON'S REPLY.

The Honourable J. H. Gordon, Attorney-General of the State of South Australia, who received a flattering reception, said:



Mr. President and Gentlemen.—Mr. See was quite right when he said that I came to this Conference with apprehensions. I did so because the past history of the river waters has not been at all satisfactory to South Australia. I want the still, small voice of South Australian rights to be heard. (Laughter.) That voice was unheard in the Conference of 1886; but it was going to make itself heard in the future. (Hear, hear.) To tell you the truth, I feared to come here alone, to be faced by the battalions of New South Wales, because I thought that I would be forced to return with a story of "another injustice to Ireland." (Laughter.) I was also afraid when I remembered, only too well, that certain of the principles brought forward by the Convention champions actually proposed to divide between the States of New South Wales and Victoria every drop of the waters of the river Murray. (Laughter.) Apart from questions of navigation and irrigation, it might be a matter of surprise to some people to know that there are fully 10,000 people in South Australia depending for daily supplies for themselves and for their stock upon the waters of the Murray. Furthermore, there is a frontage of not less than 2,000,000 acres, and that no farther away than two miles from the River of Lakes. These facts alone in themselves were surely sufficient to cause me apprehension, and to foresee a disaster to South Australia when such a monopoly of the river was hinted at. (Hear, hear.) Now, however, all these apprehensions have vanished—(cheers)—and I am now forced to acknowledge, with a grateful heart, that I have found, not only in the minds of the members of this Conference, but also in the minds of the Premiers of the sister States, a happy atmosphere of conciliation and concession. (Cheers.) Unless I am a bad judge of public events, I recognise in the results of this Conference the first fruits of Federation. (Cheers.) The first working of the great federal machine had not been accomplished without a considerable amount of discord, mistrust, and discontent, which, I am bound to say, was not by any means absent from South Australia. But now I believe, from the bottom of my heart, that the results of this Conference will be the forerunner of a great and glorious harvest. (Cheers.) We are now experiencing the better running of the machine, in the amity and good-will pervading the Commonwealth. (Hear, hear.) I shall go back to South Australia with a message that, I am sure, will materially assist in promoting that ideal of mutual concession, self-help, and whole-souled devotion to the federal idea, and to the Commonwealth—the federal spirit which has been so palpably manifest throughout the deliberations of this important Conference, and that I sincerely hope will continue, resulting in everlasting prosperity to the continent of Australia. (Loud cheers.)

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#### THE PREMIERS' RESOLUTION.

The outcome of the private conference between the Prime Minister, the two State Premiers, and the Attorney-General of South Australia, is the following resolution:—

"That a Royal Commission be appointed, consisting of one representative of each of the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, to report as to the just allotment of

the waters of the Murray basin to the use of each of the said States; as to the best methods, joint or otherwise, of their conservation, and distribution, both for the purposes of irrigation and navigation, and in particular to report promptly upon the practicability and cost of the schemes mentioned in the resolutions of the Conference."

#### VOTES OF THANKS.

The CHAIRMAN moved a vote of thanks to the Prime Minister and his State colleagues. He voiced the opinion of all present in the room when he said that their attendance, and the decision they had arrived at, filled the hearts of the promoters and all the delegates with the greatest joy. (Cheers.) The Conference had exceeded his most hopeful anticipations. (Applause.)

Mr. J. HAYES, M.L.A., seconded the motion. It had pleased him exceedingly to see the deep interest evinced in the proceedings since the opening of the Conference. With the result he was well pleased—nothing could be fairer nor more harmonious. (Cheers.)

The motion was put to the Conference and carried most enthusiastically, after which Mr. Barton returned thanks, asserting that the resolution was one of the first fruits of Federation. Although the question of navigation was a Federal one, the Federal Government would not oppose any consideration of that question by the Commission, for the simple reason that in such a case the interests of navigation and irrigation were so commingled as to be inseparable. (Cheers.)

Mr. B. R. WISE, New South Wales Attorney-General, returned brief thanks on behalf of Mr. See, and Mr. Morrissey, Minister of Agriculture, Victoria, on behalf of Mr. Peacock.

Mr. J. C. WATSON, M.H.R., leader of the Federal Labour Party, also spoke. He expressed his deep sense of obligation to the Conference, and his regret that his Parliamentary duties, which engaged him at such unearthly hours—(Laughter)—had precluded his being there before. He took a very great interest in the question. He referred to the necessity of placing any scheme adopted on a strict commercial basis—(Hear, hear)—which was imperative to success. Victoria's experience had proven the truth of this assertion. It must be remembered that if the whole work be made a Commonwealth one, then the six States will necessarily be interested. He proposed that the Federal Government be represented by an expert upon the Royal Commission. (Cheers.)

The Rev. W. C. HOSE moved as follows:—

"That the delegates of the various bodies in the three States interested—here present—desire to convey to the Chairman and members of the executive committee of the Murray River Conservation League and its secretary, whose headquarters are at Berrigan, their grateful thanks for having convened this Conference at Corowa, and to heartily congratulate them upon its success and probable results."

Dr. C. CARTY SALMON seconded the motion, and congratulated the executive as business men who had approached the great

matter in a business-like fashion. He referred particularly to the tactful manner of the chairman.

Mr. BLACKWOOD (Deniliquin) supported the motion, and referred to the question of taxation, asserting that there were very few in his own district who would cavil at a reasonable charge for the water. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. B. R. WILSON also supported, and re-echoed the sentiments of the previous speakers regarding the manly and honourable manner in which the chairman had carried out his onerous duties.

Mr. E. J. GORMAN, President of the Conference, rose to reply, amidst loud and continued applause. He said: I cannot find suitable words to express my gratification at the issue of the Conference, which itself is sufficient thanks to me for what I have done. (Hear, hear.) My earnest thanks are due to all of you for your generous response to our invitations. Coming from a place such as Berrigan, we naturally felt that we were taking a great deal on ourselves in inviting residents of three States to one representative Conference. Our only excuse is the vast and universal importance of the question. (Hear, hear.) I again repeat, that the result of the Conference has exceeded my most ardent anticipations. I never expected that such a great work would have gone on so harmoniously and resulted so satisfactorily. Our greatest hope was, that we would at least advertise it through the Press and other channels, thus setting the people thinking and furthering the movement. (Loud cheers.)

Mr. E. D. O'DWYER moved a vote of thanks to the residents of Corowa for their hospitality to visitors during the Conference, which was seconded by Messrs. Orr, M.L.C., Williamson, Hoskins (Mayor of Bendigo), and Smith, and responded to by Messrs. A. A. Piggin and A. H. Bray.

Mr. J. H. McCOLL, M.L.A., moved a vote of thanks to the Press, city and country, which was seconded by Mr. R. B. Rees, and responded to by representatives of the "Age," "Argus," and "Herald" (Melbourne), "Morning Herald" and "Daily Telegraph" (Sydney), and Messrs. Geo. Adams (Kerang "Times"), Geo. Adams (Albury "Banner"), G. H. Willis (Numurkah "Leader"), —, Reece (Corowa "Free Press"), and W. H. Elsum (Berrigan "Advocate") and also compiler of official report of the Conference.

Mr. Randall moved, Mr. McKee seconded, and Dr. Carty Salmon supported, a vote of thanks to the secretary, Mr. T. F. Kelly, for the energetic and able manner in which he had conducted the clerical work of the Conference. Mr. Kelly made a suitable response, emphasising the League's desire to include in the invitations sent out all who were interested in the movement.

On the motion of Mr. M. Clark (Gordon Shire), seconded by Mr. J. Blair, a vote of thanks was accorded the two expert engineers, Messrs. McKinney and McGregor, who suitably responded.

This brought the business of the Conference to a close.