2 October, 2011

Committee Secretary
Select Committee on Australia's Food Processing Sector
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

Dear Committee,

Re: Boron in Victoria's water supply influenced from the Victorian Desalination Project (VDP).

I am concerned regarding the uncertainty of the future concentration of Boron within Victoria's water supply. Boron is a cumulative toxin of concern to human and animal populations. Boron is in small and non harmful concentrations within traditional water supplies. However seawater has a relatively high Boron concentration and as Boron has a very low molecular weight it may not be removed adequately from seawater via reverse osmosis desalination (as with the VDP). There are additional processes (eg. alkalinisation) that may result in acceptable Boron concentrations however those processes add expense and are dependent on reliable processes (and such reliability cannot be guaranteed).

The VDP EES resulted in an undertaking that water out of the VDP prior to mixing with reservoir water would have a value less than 0.5 mg/l which was below the WHO standard at the time. However since that time, the WHO maximum recommended level has been considerable raised. I have not found any evidence that this raised level is "safe" and I am concerned that it may have been raised from pressure from the desalination industry.

My concern is that as a result of the raised WHO recommendation, that the VDP may apply to have their claims of 0.5 mg/l of new water raised. In the absence of medical evidence, this may be a considerable risk to Victorians via direct water intake and via food consumption of food irrigated by Melbourne's water supply.

I ask the commission to investigate claims that the VDP will and can keep Boron levels below 0.5 (prior to mixing), quality control of those processes and independence / transparency of monitoring of Boron levels.
I also ask the Commission to ensure that the VDP continues to produce water with Boron below 0.5 for the life of the plant (or until irrefutable scientific evidence demonstrates a safe level).

Thank you for considering this submission.
Yours sincerely,

Chris Heislers.