Biographical Note
Neil was on the Irrigation Review (2005) steering committee and the Water Reform Implementation Committee (2006) that provided advice in the Blueprint for water reform in Western Australia.

Neil is the principle shareholder in Agribusiness Research and Management and also in the second largest avocado production operation in Australia with 310 ha of avocados under irrigation, currently under expansion to around 450 ha. They also have a vineyard and nursery operation. They currently have water licences in aquifers and surface catchments totalling approximately 6500 ML, and are one of the largest users of irrigation water in the SW of WA. Until two years ago, they also had an operation in Victoria, where they accessed water from the Murray and also had bores into the aquifer there. Neil is familiar with the rules and trading of water in this jurisdiction under the NWI rules. They certainly appreciated the benefits of water trading during the drought 8 years ago.

Comments
The points I would like make on the proposed changes to water legislation in WA are:

1. There is a long overdue need for water legislation in this state to be changed to accommodate the continuing pressure on this limited resource. With increasing pressure on the resource more sophisticated management is necessary for both the environment and consumptive users.

2. Fundamentally we require a system that allows water use to migrate over time to its highest value creation uses whilst protecting/accommodating the needs of the environment. To do so we need the following:
   a. Statutory water management plans particularly in those areas where the resource is under pressure that both protect the environment and have a clear plan of what is available for consumptive use and how it is managed need to be implemented. Water access entitlements should be a share of the consumptive resource, be on a transparent and secure register that identifies any encumbrances.
   b. Where Statutory Water Management plans are not in place and licences are used there needs to be an increase in the length of time licences are in place so that a holder always has say a minimum of 20 - 25 years in front even if there is an ability for the volume to be varied. 10 years licences are not satisfactory for a business that has to sink in a lot of up front capital.
   c. We need further separation of land and water entitlements and unbundling of licences or access entitlements to facilitate efficient trading of water. This assists with migration of water to higher value creation uses and also more efficient use of water when it is a limited resource (eg temporary trading in drought).
   d. ALL water use needs to be accounted for including forestry uses and water that arises on properties.
   e. Stock and domestic use allocations need protecting
f. Metering for all use should be compulsory. If you don't measure it it is very difficult for both users and the regulators to manage it. This helps protect the resource for all stakeholders.

g. Water trading (both permanent and temporary) should be made as efficient and transparent as possible.

h. Water Resource Management Charges. Personally I have no problem with such charges PROVIDED THAT we have security of entitlement and compensation is paid if the government takes back water for public use or the environment. However irrigators have voiced strong opposition to such charges. Therefore from a pragmatic point of view it is best to impelent the new regime without such charges but over time I suspect that water entitlement holders will want their asset protected and will be willing to pay to have it managed properly.

3. Compensation for water taken back for the environment or public use.. Bennet and Gardner in their report have recommended (page 70,71)that if in the revision of statutory water management plans the govt reduces the consumptive pool other than that attributed to that due to changes in naturally availability (eg climate change) additional water for the environment or public benefit SHOULD NOT BE COMPENSATABLE. This is contrary to the NWI, and to the recommendations in the blueprint for water reform in WA (page 13) and also contrary to that accepted in NSW, Qld and the Commonwealth. I think the irrigation community are strongly opposed to such inequity and that a shared system of compensation is necessary. This has the potential to derail water reform as have the potential for water resource management charges done to date. Other than the compensation point above I agree with the very comprehensive report of Bennet and Gardner.

4. Whilst the “Blueprint for Water Reform in WA (2006)” gave reasonable detail in what is recommended to be in the proposed new legislation the recent document “Securing Western Australia’s Water Future (2013)” is short on detail but appears be along similar lines. The “devil will be in the detail” and I think that the consumptive water user community such as irrigators need keep an eye on the detail. Many of us have a lot at stake and it is important for all including the environment to get it right. All this has been on the go since 2004 and its about time the government got on with drafting the new legislation and getting it passed and implemented.