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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: rat.sen@aph.gov.au

15th December 2010

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: Inquiry into the management of the Murray-Darling Basin

Inland Rivers Network (IRN) would like to submit the following for consideration by the Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport.

IRN is a coalition of environment groups and individuals concerned about the degradation of the rivers, wetlands and groundwaters of the Murray-Darling Basin. Member groups of IRN include the Australian Conservation Foundation; the Nature Conservation Council of NSW; the National Parks Association of NSW; the Central West Environment Council; Friends of the Earth; The Wilderness Society, Sydney Branch and the Coast and Wetlands Society.

IRN has been advocating for the conservation of rivers, wetlands and groundwater in the Murray-Darling Basin since 1991. Accordingly IRN welcomed bipartisan moves to improve water management, specifically the development of an overarching Basin wide approach to the management of interconnected water sources.

IRN believes that there are huge opportunities under the Basin Plan to reassess current practices in water management, agricultural and food practices that will benefit the environment and hence sustainable production and wellbeing of Basin communities in the long-term.

In particular, there is an urgent need for improved water management practices as we wind back from existing over-allocation commitments. With this change in water management practices there also exists a great opportunity to develop and explore diversification in farming and other production activities.

As participants in the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee inquiry into *Sustainable management by the Commonwealth of water resources*, IRN would like to draw attention to some of the recommendations from this previous inquiry, particularly as they relate to this current inquiry into *The management of the Murray-Darling Basin*.

IRN supports the following recommendations from the Senate Committee Report from the *Sustainable management by the Commonwealth of water resources* inquiry (October 2010).

- . *That the government should prepare an annual report of the Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program, detailing projects completed, in progress and planned, including for each project information on costs and timelines, water savings, and the share of water savings dedicated to the environment, extractive use or other purposes.*
- . *That the Commonwealth should fund a structural adjustment package, based on the needs identified by community impact statements, for communities affected by reduced water availability resulting from the Commonwealth's water buyback program.*
- . *The Commonwealth with the states and territories should give priority to developing a more efficient and transparent water market, including setting best practice standards or regulations for water brokers or intermediaries.*
- . *The government should commit to making community impact statements for Commonwealth water purchases from each sub region of the Murray-Darling Basin.*
Note that IRN support for this final recommendation comes with the qualification that these statements should also address the ecological impacts and hence the environmental outcomes of the water purchases.

IRN also supports the following recommendations contained within the Minority Report by Independent Senator Nick Xenophon also from the *Sustainable management by the Commonwealth of water resources* inquiry;

- . *That there be an immediate full Federal takeover of the Murray-Darling Basin to ensure that there is a uniform and consistent approach to water licences in the Basin.*
- . *That the Committee re-visits this issue following the release of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's draft Basin Plan.*

IRN is currently focused on its response to the *Guide to the proposed Basin Plan*. In the meantime we tender a copy of our most recent newsletter which sets out some of our key issues of concern regarding the management of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Reeves, BSc OAM
Hon. President