

7th December 2010

Dear *Secretary,*

I wish to comment on the Murray Darling Basin Plan and some of the impacts that this Plan will have.

My family is fully dependent on agriculture and a robust local community as my husband's family own both a vineyard and winery, and a supermarket in Leeton, in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. The supermarket has been running for more than 50 years and employs over 100 people. The winery is 28 years old and over 70% of production is exported overseas. We have a stake in the environment as it is where we live and it is what provides our livelihood. The MDBA Plan will have an enormous impact on our family and on the environment in which we live.

This Plan, if implemented in its current form, will mean the end of our livelihoods. Leeton is listed as one of the towns that will become unviable. Without a population base our family supermarket will have to close, at the cost of many jobs and the loss of income for my husband (and thus myself and our children) and for my husband's family. Without enough irrigation water our vineyards become unsustainable and we also face the closure of the winery. That would leave our family with no source of income. If the town is unviable and we have no source of income we would be forced to move elsewhere. But where? To centres of higher population which are not reliant on irrigation water but already have more than enough people to fill the available jobs. And how do we fund such a move? With no future for the area, who is going to buy our home and property? With no equity, how are we going to go anywhere and how are we to raise and educate our children? The Plan in its current form is a recipe for economic and social disaster.

Not only is it a social and economic disaster, it is a flawed document that is leading us into disaster. It is based on the 2007 Water Act which had a single focus : the environment. Thus the Plan could only focus on obtaining benefits for one thing : the environment. And this is despite the fact that no one, Government, scientists, or MDBA, can state how much water the environment needs and how the water set aside for the environment would be used and what this water would actually achieve.

The Plan focuses on water shortages and drought and was developed entirely while we were enduring a severe and prolonged drought. We have just lived through the driest 15 year period on record for the MDB. Of course the health of the area declined – with no substantial rain there can be no substantial river flows. Can all this be put into an historical perspective? How often did the Murray stop flowing and the mouth close before irrigation was developed in the MDB? How soon into the current drought would the river have stopped flowing and the mouth close if there had been no irrigation storage and water conservation? How many wetlands would be in a worse state or even non-existent if there were no irrigation system to help maintain them? The natural environment of the Murray River is not one in which there is enough flow to keep the mouth of the river open. It is a cyclical one where the river has wet and dry phases, drying and flooding as rainfall levels vary. Allocating enough water to keep the Murray River mouth open is not natural.

And the other half of the story is flood mitigation. How will ~~your~~^{the} plan work in a wet cycle? Where will all the water go and what will it be used for?

Another obvious flaw in the Plan is the suggestion that only 800 jobs would be lost. As I mentioned earlier, if we lost our livelihoods, that would affect all of our employees. The flow on effect is obvious to all and to suggest that only 800 jobs would go while admitting that whole towns would be unviable is contradictory and an insult to our intelligence. No water means no farms, no families, no schools, no teachers, no hospital, no small businesses. The numbers soon add up and they are far bigger than 800.

But what I find most disturbing is that fact that, after all the months spent developing this plan, it was only after huge outcry from the communities involved that the government found it necessary to examine the impact of the Plan on the people who live here. We have been made to feel less important than a river red gum, less important than a wetland area and less important than a wading bird. In other words the people in these areas have been taken for granted and considered expandable. Men and women who have been here for generations and have worked hard to feed this country's population, develop sound agricultural practices and underpin the nation's economy have been left feeling that no one appreciates their work, that no one considers their work to be worthwhile or necessary, that no one even needs them. The attitude that the environment must be considered at all cost appals me. I agree that the environment must be considered but it must only have an equal, not superior, footing to the people in the communities affected. The economy should also be given an equal footing.

In summary, your plan would destroy our family and our community, it is flawed and has a far too narrow focus and the people in the communities affected must not be forgotten. Surely we can work together to find a balance between the environment, the economy and the people who live here. And surely we can develop this balanced plan taking into consideration the whole historical perspective of the region and not just the affects of the long drought we have just endured.

Yours sincerely

Alice Fiumara