

27/11/2010

Murray Darling Basin
Regional Australian Committee

Dear Sir,

Re:- MDB Plan on the Paroo River

I represent the Paroo River Association Inc (PRA). This organization was first officially formed in 1966 by a group of landholders concerned about their natural water rights. Their objective, as stated in their constitution was to “ preserve and maintain equitable and fair distribution of the water of the Paroo River having regard for natural and original assets thereof “ etc. Over the past forty years the PRA has grown into a group not only representing landholders but now consists of community members, scientists, NPWS and average Australians looking to preserve the Paroo River as the last free-flowing river in the MDB. During this time our organization has been able to help fight off applications for irrigation and water diversion in both Queensland and New South Wales. Important milestones along the way have included (with our support) the signing of the Resource Operations Plan for the Paroo in Queensland, the signing of the Paroo River Agreement and the New South Wales Government moratorium on irrigation in the system in New South Wales.

The present guide to the proposed Basin Plan does not impact on the Paroo River but the following points must be noted to ensure that future management plans for this iconic system must exclude irrigation development and water diversion.

- * Paroo River is the last free-flowing river in the Murray-Darling basin.
- Paroo River is mostly terminal and floods slowly into expansive wetlands reaching the Darling only in major flood events.
- Recent Scientific research indicates that the Paroo is in excellent condition and is the healthiest valley in the MDB.
- Paroo wetlands remain important natural habitats for breeding and migratory waterbirds.
- The Paroo wetlands are acknowledged to rival Kakadu in biodiversity and may become a future tourism mecca.
- During the recent drought (2001-2009) although there were long dry periods the Paroo has still had 4 major flood events (No other rivers in NSW have achieved this)
- Landholders and floodplain graziers depend on natural river flows for their livelihoods.
- Livestock graziers are often forgotten players in the water debate. They continue to produce beef, mutton, goats and wool year in, year out regardless of seasonal conditions sustaining local economies.

- Floodplain graziers are usually conservative land managers actively controlling feral pests and foreign weed species in vast tracks of land.
- NPWS are now the largest landholders on the Paroo system and are caretakers of three Ramsar sites located in Currawinya and Paroo/Darling National Parks and the Nocolleche Nature Reserve.

The Paroo River must retain its pristine status. This system is uncomplicated in that no development has yet occurred ensuring that any flows benefit both the economic livelihoods of communities and the environment in which they live.

We must learn from mistakes made in other areas in the MDB. Unsustainable levels of water extraction only lead to false expectation and economic disaster when we as Australians know that the next drought is always just around the corner.

Yours sincerely

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Robert Bartlett

Chairman, Paroo River Association Inc.