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The Secretary
House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Regional Australia
PO Box 6021, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

I desire to make this submission in regard to my views on the Development of the Murray-Darling Basin.

I am 91 years old and my ideas are based on a life time spent in agriculture in the region between the Lachlan and the Murray Rivers except for 20 years as a soldier settler at Bunnan in the Hunter Valley.

That last mentioned experience allowed me the opportunity to appreciate the vast difference between summer and winter rainfall crops and their moisture requirements.

Much of the discussion about the M-D Development is about water and about the amount of food per megalitre of water used in its production.

The extent of the basin allows enormous quantities of water to be evaporated so work such as has been done at Baren Box Swamp, West of Griffith, is worth mentioning. Baren Box Swamp had been a naturally occurring depression, used since the inception of the M.I.A. as a receptacle for drainage and run-off water from the M.I.A.

Large areas were flooded at most times to a shallow depth so banks were built to confine the water into deeper areas and a channel was built to allow water to be returned to the Murrumbidgee River near Carrathool.

Because the land level above sea-level falls 200 feet on 100 miles between Narrandera and Hay this return of drainage water from the M.I.A. to the river could be done by gravity. There has even been a bush fire on the same land in Baren Box Swamp since the drainage scheme which had been permanently under water.

The scheme saved some water from evaporation. There are similarly hundreds of acres of shallow water in the Menindee Lakes Scheme. Perhaps a system of earthworks could allow this shallow water to be diverted first into the Darling River or the Anna branch. Which brings me to the evaporation from Lake Alexandrina. Coleambally Irrigation area and Lake Alexandrina are similar in size. In calculating security of water in farm dams, I have always allowed one foot per month for

evaporation so I can accept the estimate that the Lake Alexandrina lost up to 10 feet or 3 metres per year.

This gets little or no food from this water so plans to keep it full of rain water have to be costed at what food could be produced if the Lake were to be allowed to become a sea water lake.

I am not aware what the calculations are of the rise in sea levels world wide if our ice caps and glaciers melt but there are opinions that it could rise by more than one metre.

Thus would place considerable strain on the mouth of the Murray River where it flows into the Lake so a weir or a barrage may be necessary to hold the two waters apart but to allow any excess, as is happening now, to join the ocean waters.

Such a weir, with a pipeline on each side would allow a water supply to those irrigators who presently pump from the Lake.

Sub - surface water allows no evaporation from the storages and the various weirs along our western flowing rivers in the basin would have helped to recharge the sand beds. Maybe more weirs should be considered just for the purpose. Many of our inland people depend on this source of water for urban as well as stock and domestic supply.

Regarding technology

I lived at Galore for 24 years. I had an irrigation quota of 900 megs from Old Man Creek, a branch of the Murrumbidgee River. After a hot dry summer, which was the normal and with unreliable autumn rainfall it was necessary to flood irrigate to get enough moisture in the soil to get a satisfactory germination and early growth of winter crops.

Sometimes it would take the equivalent of 200 or 250 ^{inches} ~~inches~~ of rain to get the water over the paddock so great was the absorption of the clay ground, yet a centre pivot applying the equivalent of 40 or 50mms would have been sufficient.

So centre pivots or overhead sprays, both mobile and fixed are the way to go.

Some work has been done growing rice under spray irrigation. If the results are discovering at first I'd say preserved average rice yields in the Riverina are about 7 tonnes per hectare. They were ~~NOT~~ always like that and it took innovative farmers and researchers to achieve the present standard.

Thus more research in irrigation techniques is necessary in regard to night spaying, fertiliser induction coupled with drought tolerant varieties and the questioning of held commercial developments and their efforts on human and animal and friendly bird and insect life.

Advanced technology and infrastructure will cost money so your committee will need to keep its feet on the ground, as it were.

It is not my province to more than suggest some examples from history, The Snowy Mountains Authority was established in June 1949 with a clause which stated "The authority shall have power to borrow money from the Commonwealth Bank of Australia upon the approval of the Treasurer".

That clause was strenuously contested as reported in Hansard of that time but was eventually used by its opponents when they came to power though I found it impossible to get a concise answer until Rex Connor became Minister for Energy in the Whitlam Government.

Borrowing money by government for necessary works is usually loaded with an interest burden that makes the loans unattractive.

There have been other ways if the situation required action. There were the 'assignats' of the French Revolution, the 'greenbacks' of the American Civil War or the 'Bradbury's' of August 1914 when the British Banks including the Bank of England closed their doors as withdrawals by British depositors of their bank balances could not be satisfied. Lord Bradbury, as Chancellor of the Exchequer (Treasurer to us) organised the printing of banknotes backed by the revenue of the British Government and a holiday on the Monday for all banks so that the notes could be delivered to the bank took place.

When depositors assembled on the Tuesday to draw their money and found they could get full payment they decided to leave it in the banks, the crisis was over. All we learned was that we've had a bank holiday on 1st Monday in August ever since and gradually extending beyond the banks.

We have a Reserve Bank as "lender of last resort" for our private banks. The agreement reached in September 1985 between Treasury and the Reserve Bank regarding Reserve Bank advances to Government may not allow cheap money for infrastructure but there are some people who would like to see out Reserve Bank, not a Banker's Bank – as one Federal Member is recorded in Hansard - but as a people's bank.

The water supply problem of the Murray Darling Basin cannot be treated as an isolated problem. Already our major cities are looking to the Snowy Scheme storages as future security for their citizens and we cannot morally deny that claim but we might suggest a cap on our city populations or a statement as to when such a cap will be considered. However, this may be outside the guidelines of the Committees enquiries.

Well, Secretary, history records the case of an individual, and I think he was a Philistine, who was "aggravated" by the jaw-bone of an ass. I would hope you and any committee members who have read this submission so far will not be too much put out or dismayed by what you've been so patient with.

Yours Respectfully

D.J. McCleary