

Submission No 128

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To Standing Committee Secretary , Chairman and Committee
members dated Monday 29 November 2010

Introduction

This submission has been prepared and forwarded to the Regional Australia Standing committee by **ELIZABETH ANN CROSS** , fully employed and resident at 5 Tinga Crescent ,Wagga Wagga NSW 2650 .
I am aged 61 years and have lived and raised my three children in Wagga Wagga NSW . Myself , my husband , three children have all been educated and employed in the Riverina and Canberra regional areas and are among the three million Australians that are affected by the rivers and waters of the Murray Darling Basin . My family and their spouses are all employed full time in these regions including one family member who owns their own business in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area .

Submission

My concerns regarding the Murray Darling Basin Plan are as follows ;

1. Proposed Reductions

The serious impact that proposed reductions of 27% - 37% in the volume of water from watercourse diversions that is available for consumptive use (irrigation , town water supplies, farming , agriculture and industry etc. (SDLs) in the Murray Darling Basin (MDB) will have on the social and economic fabric and vitality of the three million people living in these regional communities .

The Murray - Darling Basin is the life blood and backbone of Australia food production and vital to our daily existence and sustenance of this nation and it makes no sense to diminish or reduce its capacity to be productive and allocate water to wetlands and the environment

The communities and industries in the Murray Darling Basin generate 39%of Australia's national income from agriculture,

The communities and industries in the Murray Darling Basin produce 53 % of Australian cereals grown from grain , 95% of oranges, and 54% of apples,

The communities and industries support 28 % of Australia's cattle herd , 45 % of sheep and 62 % of pigs ,
The Murray Darling Basin river systems support 65% of Australia's irrigated lands, much of which is in the Riverin',s Murrumbidgee Irrigation and Colleambally irrigation areas .

There are over 30,000 wetlands including 16 of international significance that are surviving in the Murray Darling basin even after 9 years of drought . Water diversions to our Australian primary industries should not have to be reduced and suffer to maintain any more than 50 % of these economically unproductive areas. There are more than adequate species of water birds , fish. invertebrates and plants that survive in the numerous oceans that cover two thirds of this planet

It is imperative that the enormous strain placed on the Basin's communities , primary and secondary industries and natural environment by the prolonged severe drought for past 9 years be recognized and addressed by all Australians, Australian and State Governments .

To implement any scheme or plan that proposes cuts of 27% and 37 % in water available to irrigators and agricultural industries would be totally destructive to the viability of these regional and national industries . For the plan to ignore and not recognize that outcome is a demonstration of a serious lack of common sense , total ignorance or alternatively a view biased toward an alternative ideology or backward socialist political agendas.

2.The MDBA plan does not include any consideration or plan to divert water from alternatives and other significant and wasted water sources within Australia

Although recent drought breaking rains have eased the stain on the MDB river systems , the Australian Government must take immediate action to drought proof the entire MDB and prevent any recurrence of the damage due to lack of water in these river and wetland systems .

The recent heavy and wide spread flooding from rainfall in the MDB catchment is clear evidence that nature does provide excess and more than adequate water in the basin which is a natural asset not being harvested and wasted to Bass strait and the ocean .

Many Australians in the MDB regions are fully aware of the Snowy Mountain Hydro Scheme that was built by the Australian , NSW and Victorian Governments in years 1949 to 1974 to harvest and divert water flows and the enormous benefits that scheme brought to Australia and particularly the Murray and Murrumbidgee Irritations Areas . Governments have done nothing worthwhile or of any significance in respect to national water conservation since the Chifley Labor government introduced an act to start the Snowy Mountain river scheme in the late 1940's and that is 40 years of doing absolutely nothing during that period.

We now see a MDBA plan that will divert this conserved water into non productive waste and wetlands and the Australian Government spending around \$7 billions of taxpayer dollars in buying back water allocations and is counter productive . It is surprising that the plan does not suggest the dams in the Snowy scheme should be commissioned and allow water flows proceed naturally for the environmental only

The MDBA plan states a total \$12 billion of taxpayer dollars will be spent but not a single dam, weir , pipe or channel is specified in the MDBA plan

There should be a concerted effort by Australian Governments to build more dams , channels , pipelines and infrastructures to harvest and divert excess water from coastal and northern catchments and rivers systems to supplement the natural water flows into the MDB river systems .

The Victorian Government has built a North South 700 kilometer pipe line infrastructures to divert water from the Murray River to the urban areas of Melbourne on and not yet publicly released scenario that the diversion water was sourced from alleged efficiencies /savings in irrigation practices . How a major diversion taking water out of the MDB was even considered let constructed is beyond my comprehension

There are reports that each year there could be well over 90,000 gicalitres of water flowing into the Gulf of Carpentaria (CSIRO records average rainfall is 510,000 gicalitres, i.e. equivalent to 1,200 Sydney Harbor storages) most of which could be harvested and diverted to the northern MDB river systems to significantly increase water volumes in both diversions and environment flows in the MURRAY DARLING BASIN which has a total capacity of 22,581 gicalitres with 75 % actual volume of 17,030 gicalitres at the time when the MDBA plan was drafted .

(by comparison the plan records Australia's 8 capital cities with populations totaling 12 million had 12,185 gicalitres of water inflows in 2004-05 of which only 1,743 gicalitres is allocated for residential , commercial, municipal and industrial consumption .)

The Australian Government and the standing committee on Regional Australia and the MDBA should review the 70 year old Bradfield plan as recommended by past Queensland Premier Peter Beattie and the late Sir Richard Pratt of the Visey group . The cost of building pipelines for diversion of water from north Queensland rivers to the Warrego and Tompson rivers and then onto the Murray Darling basin was costed at \$1.4 billion in 1980's and estimated at \$6 billion in 2007.

3.The uncertainty in MDBA statement regarding forecast /targets no reductions in individual water entitlement holder allocations

"The Murray–Darling Basin Authority acknowledges that implementing SDLs may have significant social and economic implications for individual entitlement holders and communities across the Basin.

However the Australian Government has committed to recovering sufficient water access entitlements to fully offset the impact of SDLs across the Basin, including the Murrumbidgee region. This will be achieved through a combination of purchasing entitlements in the market and investments in more efficient irrigation infrastructure. Consequently, should these targets be met, there are likely to be no reductions in individual water entitlement holder allocation

I also share the concerns of many that have already been expressed at some of the community meetings held recently as follows

4.Social-economic Impacts

- **about people's mental health and the impacts on people who are dealing with a lot of debt.**
- that water is needed for small towns and primary production to survive.
- that the proposals in the MDBA Guide could have catastrophic impacts that would "decimate" communities; that impacts will effect whole communities as farms and jobs are lost, including preschools, factories, motels, retailers , hospitals ,doctors, dentist, bank managers, and real estate.
- that the sustainable diversion limits will wipe out irrigation and primary production .
- about how much of the irrigation network might be shut down as a result of the proposals in the Guide and the impacts that this would have on irrigators left behind.
- about food supply and food security - that reducing the amount of water we use to produce food will impact on food supply and prices both in Australia and internationally; that Australia has/will become a net importer of food; that the world is running out of food and we are talking about reducing food supply - while we act to save our environment children in third world countries will die ; and that the government should protect rural food growers and help them to prosper.
- that there is too much focus on the environment – it should be about farmers and industry as well.
- about the impacts of this following the drought - people have just survived the worst drought on record – farms have gone, food factories are in jeopardy and communities need security that there will still be water to grow food, and generate jobs.
- that water is only being taken from farmers.

5.Efficiency and engineering solution

- about the lack of investment in infrastructure for the future – that our forefathers put infrastructure in place but there has been no major investment since Dartmouth was built in the 1970s; that all infrastructure investment since then has been done by irrigators,
- that the irrigation community is being demonised when irrigators have been investing in better water management – for example 90% of Victorian irrigation is now tape and drip, and center pivots.
- that the plan does not address finding or harvesting more water to divert into the Murray Darling basin .
- about how much engineering solutions and dams will be considered to help achieve environmental outcomes.

6.Environment and sustainability

- what is being used to measure environmental health and that this is all happening at a time when water quality has actually improved – that the parameters for measuring health in *The Living Murray Program* were salinity, fish and invertebrates, and over last 30 years these things have improved.
- that there are many things that affect river health, not just river flows
- That farms and farmers are an important part of the environment too and they are good for the environment - the environment is not just the river and there should be an assessment of the environmental impact this will have on farms, as well as the impact of reducing farms which are producing many environmental benefits such as growing plants that use CO².
- That farmers are environmentalists – they manage environmental resources – give them a chance to do it.
- That people go on about the environment and how much it's suffering, but there have been dry times before and there will be again – the Murray is in flood now and the environment is looking better.
- about evaporative losses in the system through the Menindee Lakes and the Lower Lakes, and that water being saved will be sent down to South Australia to evaporate in the Lower Lakes or flow out to sea.

- The way the river is managed now there has always been water flowing down it, the flood plains are controlled and the wildlife are benefiting from it, and that this plan will wipe most of that out.
- That there should be a study of the beneficial impacts of irrigation to the environment compared with simply pumping water out into lakes or onto trees that have already managed to survive the drought.
- that this is not only about the environment – it is about urbanisation and the future primary production

7.Science and Information base

- Climate change science is falling over and not proven - there have always been droughts and they are always followed by a wet period.
- the social and economic analysis is not very comprehensive and that the costs in relation to economic losses and job losses are vastly underestimated in the Guide.
- many of the reports used in developing the Guide have not been peer reviewed and the science needs to be reviewed.
- **the river system has improved in the last five years and this is not reflected in the report.**

8.Processes and Consultation

- there are similarities between this and other community consultation processes, in which rural people thoughts and concerns didn't make any difference – "this MDBA plan will be exactly the same and washed under the carpet".
- the plan is about people and bureaucrats in the city who know very little about primary industries telling people in the country and primary producers what to do.

9 .Conclusion

Australia needs a positive plan for our future which relies on the future of our primary food production and industries and not a negative plan like the MDBA plan that will destroy and "kill off " those industries and inevitably their associated communities

thank you

Elizabeth Ann Cross