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Inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia

Submission: Mr Tim Lukins.

The Standing Committee on Regional Australia will inquire into and report on the socio-economic impact of the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Authority's 'Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan' (the Proposed Basin Plan) on regional communities, with particular reference to:

- The direct and indirect impact of the Proposed Basin Plan on regional communities, including agricultural industries, local business activity and community wellbeing;

I have a key concern that no credit is being given for work already done to underpin local communities and primary producers- such as water sharing plans already in place: we haven't had irrigation water essentially since 2001, all to do with drought and covered (including environmental flows) by our sharing plan. PROBLEM: the drought is now receding and our productivity is trying to be taken away....: we are hesitant to spend money on capital items (eg. More efficient pumping infrastructure) with out the security that a simple and reasonable sharing plan offers: the current proposal is all about take, take, take!! With no justifiable basis!

As a dweller along the Lachlan River, it is even harder to justify the currently proposed models as our river doesn't flow into the MDbasin in all years bar the highest floods (over 20 years now!!) yet the viability of our town financially is being eroded.

- Options for water-saving measures or water return on a region-by-region basis with consideration given to an analysis of actual usage versus licence entitlement over the preceding fifteen years

All very well to say the "last 15 years" but 10 of these are major drought in which the water sharing plan stopped all irrigating for most of the time (as it should have) until flows returned to more 'normal' levels; the best "water saving measures" come from improving efficiencies in delivery and application of irrigation water. Historically, the Lachlan River is far from overcommitted with irrigation licences- but allocations have always been linked closely to storage inflows/availability of water.

- The role of governments, the agricultural industry and the research sector in developing and delivering infrastructure and technologies aimed at supporting water efficiency within the Murray-Darling Basin.

Government instruments (such as MDBA) should be overseeing quality research and scientific approach to water supply and the agricultural irrigation industry: sadly, more recently they are instead being pushed by unscientifically collected 'data' more akin to greens agenda and drought reality than substantiatable measurements and historical usage data.

The key to water savings here is not buyback BUT efficiency gains- wasted water is of no use to anyone or any environmental considerations- and these require support and research and new technology development to implement.

Healthy and viable rural communities are VITAL to feeding our nation- and this area is most definitely within the government arena; continually eroding our productivity base won't achieve this.

In concluding: if our MDBasin is worth saving then it can't be too badly damaged- after 200years of use; of course there are examples of where practices have damaged environmental considerations BUT these are very much the minority of situations and ones that need to be dealt with case by case to avoid in future. One of the biggest damages is being caused by the barrages at the bottom of the Murray River and it even has a very affordable solution (open them!) and this will reclaim thousands of gigalitres per year otherwise lost through evaporation. No one has yet published a good argument as to why they are needed as far as I have seen- decisiveness on the big issues is more important even than some of the smaller ones.