

**Submission Number: 134**  
**Date Received: 30/11/2010**

*Sc*

**SUBMISSION TO THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON RURAL AFFAIRS, and THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE STANDING COMMITTEE .**

**RE: The Murray Darling Basin Authority Plan**

During the last 45 years, our farm has supported the needs of our family, as we have raised, equipped and educated four children, all of whom are contributing strongly to the city and country communities in which they are now raising their families. With the implementation of the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan this property and significantly many others which have made equally valuable contributions to the health and growth of Australian communities, will no longer be viable as a means of providing for the needs of their families.

During these years our property has been the home the One Oak Merino Studs, which have supplied Merino Sheep genetics to a wide area of Eastern Australia, as well as other parts of Australia and wool growing countries across the globe. We have been able to maintain a consistent supply of genetics to clients, with stock delivered in the required condition of health and development and at an economic value to allow both ourselves and our clients the viability required to fulfil the developmental and educational needs of our families, and provide for our own self support at the mature end of our lives. The proposed reductions in supply of irrigation water will ensure that this supply will no longer be possible to maintain. It is not an economical alternative to replace farm produced food supplies for the sheep with commercially sourced supplementary feeds. These are necessarily too expensive and labour intensive to be viable. Without adequate water, this farm and many others, will become unviable in today's cost of production and marketing climate.

Further to and in support of the sheep husbandry and breeding operation, we have also grown winter cereals. Irrigation water is essential to ensure the viability of this enterprise with today's operational costs and market conditions.

The reduction of water supply will have a huge negative bearing on local businesses and services. The effect will eventually flow into the larger regional communities and finally, the cities. The effects of drought and the closure of the red gum forest logging operation on the Deniliquin community has clearly demonstrated this fact. I am a leader on the administration department of one of Deniliquin 's churches. I am seeing great downward pressure on the morale of our church members as they struggle to survive economically. It is becoming increasingly difficult to retain the services of our pastor and to sustain viable churches. Their closure and the loss of pastoral care they and their ministers provide in the town is a real possibility in the face of the future without sufficient water to ensure the viability of the community. Many people are forced to leave the town, following failure of farming without water, the ensuing non-sustainability of businesses and the resulting loss of jobs. E.g. For many years one of our leading church members has run one of the most innovative and successful engineering businesses in the region, consistently training young industrial workers and employing family providers. He will be forced release all of his staff and close his doors if the present proposition is implemented.

What consideration has been given to the flow-on effect of the coming migration to the regional centres and cities, as these people seek housing, schooling, support and employment? With the implementation of the proposed MDB plan this scenario will be repeated across the Basin. It will affect more than just a few families and communities.

The food and fibre produced by the Murray Darling Basin is of significant value to the GDP. This provision reaches not only Australian markets, but helps in the provision of food to the people of the poor and under privileged nations.

Mr. Paul O'Rourke, CEO of international child support organization, Compassion, has some time ago published in the organization's quarterly magazine "Compassion", his concern at the worldwide devaluation of farming, a major factor undermining his organization's ability to source and afford food in the face of reducing availability. Sustaining the improvement they have made to the health and food supplies in countries where they labour to save people from poverty and starvation, has become increasingly difficult, and he states they are now losing hard fought gains. The attitude of those who advocate increased importation of Australia's food requirements, is the promotion of a selfcentered, "I'm alright Jack" attitude toward human need.

The day will come when it will be recognized that this was a gross misjudgement and a great deal more money will then have to be spent to replace valuable infrastructure which presently exists and could be improved upon, but is under threat of being dismantled by this plan and much of the philosophy upon which it is based.

With this plan, an attempt is being made to retain as far as possible, the natural environment of the Murray Darling Basin, minimizing the developmental influence of man. The extreme end of this view ie. to do this completely, idealistically, would reap a devastating effect on the region's ability to live and produce, with little advance on the conditions in which the original Australian people were living at the time of white settlement. At best, it will devastate the lives of too many people and the position of Australia as a productive trading nation. There is obviously a median which must be reached, which will accommodate both the best possible flow of the Murray river and the living requirements of today's Basin population and culture. This would require the reassessment of not just the upper end of the basin, but the whole Basin. Historically, there has been inadvertently an ad hock approach to the establishment of some areas of the present river infrastructure. To arrive at a solution where the gains are not also discriminative, requires attention to these areas, not just a punitive, Robin Hood approach, which is resulting in extremism from the various interest groups.

There are a couple of questions which need consideration in the approach to a solution to the Murray Darling Basin issues:

- Prior to the building of the various dams along the river system how many times would the rivers have flooded out onto the plains/wetlands? Under natural conditions, would the rivers have most years stayed within their banks, breaking out onto the floodplains/wetlands only in years of well above average rainfall?
- Is it not significant regarding the resilience of the natural flora and fauna of the Basin, that following the longest dry period in relation the current population, the abundant rainfall throughout the basin has immediately been reflected in the immediate reappearance of flora and fauna also in abundance? When dry times return, the levels of sustained life decrease. Is this not a natural cycle in a country known for its wide rainfall fluctuations?

Let us take one obvious example of an area which desperately needs re-designing. The removal of the barge at Goolwa, and the supply of river water from upstream, equivalent to the amount now evaporating, would be a positive place to start. It is well known that the evaporation of water from Lake Alexandrina presently exceeds the water usage of the MIA.

The salt content in the water that has presently built up behind the barge would revert to natural, lower salt levels, as the sea is allowed to flow back and forth naturally at the mouth of the Murray, keeping the mouth open to allow the river its natural flow into the sea. Before this water reaches the point where salt contamination from the returning sea flow begins, the amount supplied for irrigation purposes could be redirected by a new infrastructure, which would pipe or channel this fresh water to points of irrigation usage, allowing continued production by irrigation throughout the Lower Lakes area. This would ensure that the amount of water presently being supplied, but which falls prey to evaporation, now remains useful irrigation water, with no reduction in water supply to either Upper Region or Lower Lakes irrigators.

In this environment, flora & fauna would retain their original, natural levels.

To achieve an effective approach to establishing more efficient infrastructure, where appropriate, along the river system, would require a fresh and bipartisan approach, honestly divested of personal or political point-scoring.

Food and fibre supply and the welfare of many sectors of the population of Eastern and Southern Australia is dependant upon a healthy and continually developing Agricultural industry.

Graham Wells

Managing Director

One Oak Pty. Ltd.

Jerilderie

NSW 2716