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13<sup>th</sup> December 2010

House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Regional Australia  
P.O. Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**SUBJECT:** The Standing Committee's Inquiry into the Socio-economic impact of the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Authority's Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan.

The following submission is put forward for consideration by the Standing Committee keeping in mind, as far as possible, the required terms of reference.

1. Impact on the Local Community.
2. Options for Water Saving.
3. Measures to increase water efficiency and reduced consumption.
4. Comment and Observations.
5. Recommendations.
6. Experience and Qualifications of the Writer.

**1. IMPACT ON THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

Having been born in Deniliquin in 1932, my interest in the town and district has always been of prime concern. My wife and I conducted an Electrical Retail business from 1986 to October 2005. Deniliquin, being very much a Rural town, was hit very hard by the severe drought during the last five years that we were in business ie.. 2000 to 2005.

Our turnover during this time diminished by around 25%. This was due mostly to the down-turn in farming income. After 2005, Deniliquin was further penalized by the closure of the Rice Mill with the loss of around 200 jobs. Lack of irrigation water was the direct cause of the down-turn.

**OPTIONS FOR WATER SAVING**

One of the major causes for the increased demand for irrigation water has been the almost unrestricted sales. It defies logic that water can be sold in one area and transferred several hundred kilometers away to a totally unrelated district. People who buy water on the open market use it. In the past, landowners who had water entitlements surplus to their requirements did nothing with it. This surplus water was available for environmental flows. Due to the "open market", this surplus water has now been sold off.

Landholders under financial stress have been forced to sell their water to survive. These were not willing sellers.

The end result was diminished land value and loss of collateral ultimately resulting in sale of the property or possible bankruptcy.

All of the above factors impact on local communities.

**3. MEASURES TO INCREASE WATER EFFICIENCY AND REDUCE CONSUMPTION.**

Governments can give practical assistance to Irrigators by financing water saving methods e.g.

Spray Irrigation, piping open channels, lining large channels etc. This is a more sensible approach to the water problem rather than water buy back.

#### 4. COMMENT AND OBSERVATIONS.

- (a) Menindee Lake Storage About May 2008 my wife and I visited Menindee. Three of the major lakes were full. Despite the huge volume of water, the weir was completely shut down reducing the Darling to a muddy drain. Landholders downstream and South Australia were at this time desperate for water. Allowing for the enormous evaporation in the Menindee area it would seem ludicrous that this resource is not better utilized.
- (b) Water Entitlement. As with the NSW Water Act of 1912, a "Water Right" attached to and remained at all times with the land. This effectively stabilized land values and retained landholders equity. When the permanent water is sold off, the land virtually becomes useless as collateral and forced sale frequently results. A permanent water entitlement should be allowed on the basis of irrigable land and left permanently attached to the respective holding. Water requirements over and above the "Water Right" can be administered according to availability and seasonal conditions etc.
- (c) The Coorong and Murray Mouth Barrage. Despite the push to "restore" the Murray, the obvious remedy at the Murray mouth has been ignored. Those landholders who would be affected by the removal of the barrage could be compensated which would be a small cost compared to the "Proposed Basin Plan"
- (d) General Despite a ten year drought the Murray River is not dying and was never in the poor condition that we were led to believe by those who preached doom and gloom. Around 1913 the Murray and the Edward rivers stopped flowing. With the construction of the dams in the Murray Darling basin, all of the major streams have continued to run. Water quality was maintained and fishing is the best it has been for about fifty years. Salinity downstream in the Murray is frequently blamed on the irrigators upstream. Explorer Sturt around 1838 was quoted as saying that "the Murray at Mildura was too saline to drink". Practically all of the lakes from Swan Hill area to Lake Alexandrina are saline.
- (e) The Seasonal change over the past year must certainly bring home the futility of irresponsible cuts in water entitlements and unnecessary acquisition of water from landholders.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATION THAT ;:

- (a) The Sale of water be ceased immediately.
- (b) Sensible water rights be restored to the land.
- (c) Purchase of water by the Federal Government be stopped
- (d) Alternative supply and storage of water be investigated at Federal level e.g. pipelines, dams etc.
- (e) Finance be made available to farmers to improve water savings and efficiency.
- (f) The Murray Darling Basin Authority immediately cease further activities pending the outcome of the Standing Committee Enquiry.

#### 6. EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS.

From 1950 approximately 14 years as a staff member of the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission. Experience in survey, water control and regulation in channels. Approx 10 years in administration in Deniliquin and Griffith. Some share-farming.  
Insurance Industry approx 21 years - Associate of the Australian Insurance Industry. Rural Insurance, Assessment of Crop damage etc. 19 years Electrical Retail in Deniliquin.

I trust that the above will assist the Standing Committee in some way with its deliberations.

Yours faithfully,

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