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1st December 2010

SUBJECT: DRAFT MURRAY DARLING BASIN PLAN

The following points are put forward relative to the allocation and distribution of water.

Submission No 150 SC

1. Water Entitlements
2. Sale and/or transfer of water.
3. Menindee Lakes Storage and Darling flow.
4. Coorong and Murray Mouth Barrage.
5. General.

1 SALE AND/OR TRANSFER OF WATER.

The open marketing of water by its very nature effectively increases - (a) the price of water and (b) the use and demand for water.

(a) The price for water is governed by supply and demand. People who have water surplus to their requirements are willing sellers. Thus surplus water in the past has always been available for environmental flows. Farmers under financial stress sell to survive, thus decreasing the value of their land and ultimately forcing them to sell out. In the hands of Agents, water is sold to the highest bidder for which the Agent receives commissions which in turn increases the asking price.

(b) The demand for water is increased by the mere fact that people who buy it will use it. Water generally is not purchased by non-users. Speculative buying and selling also adversely increases price.

Sale of water should immediately be stopped and transfer should only be allowed between holdings owned under the same name or title.

2 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 the farmers equity. When the permanent water is sold off the land virtually becomes useless as collateral and forced sales result.

A permanent water entitlement should be allocated on the basis of irrigable land and permanently attached to the respective holding.

3 MENINDEE LAKES STORAGE AND DARLING FLOW.

Approximately two and a half years ago three of the major lakes at Menindee were full. It defies common sense that the main weir was completely shut down and the Darling River was reduced to a muddy drain. The evaporation in this area is extremely high and yet no water was released downstream despite the need by South Australia and the landholders along the river who were struggling at the time.

4 THE COORONG AND MURRAY MOUTH BARRAGE.

Despite the push to "restore" the Murray, the obvious remedy at the Murray mouth has been ignored. Those landowners affected by the removal of the barrage could be compensated which in turn would be a small cost compared to the proposed "Basin Plan".

5 GENERAL

Despite a ten year drought the Murray River is not dying and was not in the poor condition that we are led to believe. Early in the twentieth century, the Murray and the Edward Rivers stopped flowing. With the construction of the various Dams, flow in the Murray Darling Basin Rivers has been maintained. Water quality is excellent, fishing is the best that it has been for about fifty years.

Salinity in the lower end of the Murray has nothing to do with irrigation upstream. Explorer Sturt in about 1838 was quoted as saying that "the Murray at Mildura was too saline to drink". Practically all of the lakes from around Swan Hill to Lake Alexandrina are saline.

RECOMMENDED THAT::

1. Sale of water be ceased immediately.
2. Sensible Water Rights be restored to the land.
3. Purchase of water by the Federal Government be stopped immediately.
4. Alternative supply and storage of water be investigated - e.g. pipelines, dams etc.
5. Finance be made available to farmers to improve irrigation efficiency.
6. The Murray Darling Basin Authority be immediately instructed to investigate the socio-economic impact on all regional communities before going further with water diversions for environmental flows.

Finally I would like to say as a former staff member of the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission (1950 to 1964) that I have a good appreciation of the irrigation industry and understand fully the farmers problems.

It would seem that the prime cause for this M.D.B. plan has been the extended drought. At no time has this been stated or taken into account by the Authority.

I suggest that the Authority members and Politicians have a long hard look at history where they will find that all of the current problems have happened many times before. Creating a permanent water shortage will not help.

Yours faithfully

Russell J Fisher J.P.