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The Windsor Inquiry into the impact of the MDBP
On Regional Australia

Dear Mr Windsor

**THIRD LETTER FROM SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL REGION OF RIVERINA
IN RELATION TO WATER ISSUES**

RESPONSE TO THE GUIDE TO THE DRAFT MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN

In July 2009 and again in March 2010, members of Soroptimist International Region of Riverina (representing women in eight towns in the Riverina/Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area) voiced our grave concerns in relation to the Federal Government's water policies to well over 50 Federal and NSW State M.P.s both in the government and the opposition.

- **We called for water justice for all** (supporting the work of the Water4Food group and the Riverina and Murray Regional Organisation of Councils (RAMROC). **Food security and the sustainability of our farmers and the towns that support them are just as important as a healthy river system. We also walked well over 2000 km and held community walks to highlight our concerns.**
- **We acknowledged the support of Soroptimist International** (which has general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council) **for all the UN declarations on the equitable distribution of water for the use of human beings AND the environment** e.g. Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration: "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature".
- **We stated that climate change, the environment and water issues cannot be dealt with without addressing the issues of food security and the sustainability of our country towns.**

Many responses were received. Most did not adequately address our main concerns: **FOOD SECURITY AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF OUR COUNTRY TOWNS.**

The extremely strong public backlash following the release of the Guide to the Draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan very clearly shows that our concerns dating from 2009 were well founded. The proposed SDLs and the effects of the water buy backs up until that time (not to mention the new round of water buy backs just announced) ring the death knell for irrigation communities across the Murray Darling Basin.

We acknowledge the needs of the environment. However the economic and social needs of human beings are an integral part of that environment. OUR ENVIRONMENT.

We fully support the Parliamentary enquiry instigated by Minister Burke.

The Water Act 2007 Section 20 d states that the Basin's water resources should be used and managed in a way that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes. Apparently this "triple bottom line" is not mentioned very much apart from this.

Depending on whom one listens to:

- The Water Act 2007 must be changed because it does not make any provision for anything except the environment
- The Water Act 2007 does make provision for economic and social needs as well as the environment, but the MDBA chose not to deal with these aspects

Most of us are not lawyers or experts on Acts of Parliament. We need those with expertise to do the right thing by all Australians.

It is not up to community groups to provide options for water saving measures or options to increase water efficiency (as stated in the Terms of Reference for the Parliamentary Enquiry).

It IS up to community groups such as ours to stand up for communities across the Murray-Darling Basin, which are all under threat

- IT IS UP TO THOSE WHO GOVERN THIS COUNTRY TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR THE GOOD OF ALL AUSTRALIANS
- WE ALL DESERVE BETTER THAN A GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY WHICH HIDES BEHIND AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT – IF THIS IS THE CASE; WE DON'T KNOW
- WE ALL DESERVE THE TRUTH

If the Water Act 2007 needs to be changed, change it.

If food production and rural communities can be safeguarded within the Act, then they need to be safeguarded.

All we can do is rely on those with the power to do something positive in regard to this matter to do it.

There can be water justice for all. There can be a balance struck between the very real needs of the environment and the very real economic and social needs of the 2 million people who live in the Murray-Darling Basin as well as the food security of all Australians.

Yours sincerely

(Mrs) Will Mead
President
Sorooptimist International
Region of Riverina