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The Chief Executive Officer

Murray Darling Basin Authority

Dear Mr Freedman

I am from regional NSW, Deniliquin, and I operate a mixed irrigation farm growing wheat, rice, sheep and cattle under the Murray Irrigation Limited company. I have been farming since 1978. I am originally from Melbourne, married and have three children that have grown up on the farm 'East Tolans'.

Farming was profitable and satisfying until the drought of 2002 and my wife and I were able to bring up our three children comfortably. Water was abundant and water allocation was not a problem as there seemed to be water for everybody including the environment. There was *no trading* of water and it remained with the land and if it was not used it was socialized and left in the dams. The so called "sleeper" licences were not activated then, instead simply gave that farmer who did not use his water allocation, an increase in his farm valuation.

The cereal crops we grew (rice and wheat) were well marketed through the Australian Wheat Board and the Rice growers co-operative and one could concentrate on a product rather than selling it. The MIL region was thriving with a successful rural and forestry community. The population was increasing each year. Local clubs were active and well supported and community infrastructure was secure. People from the city respected our irrigation profession and one felt deep satisfaction on their food producing achievements and their overall environmental and irrigation infrastructure improvements.

How things change! Since 1999 water has been traded like a commercial share and the water that was not used (sleeper licences) suddenly became active and tradable and that is when the word "**over allocation**" became the politicians and greens "**catch- cry**". The drought hit us in 2002 and for the first time in my farming career I did not receive my full water allocation. In fact from 2002 – 2010 I only received an average 28% of my full water allocation entitlement. Yet I am **obligated** to pay 100% of fixed water charges to that water allocation. Farmers lost water as well as the environment. Both are dependent upon catchment inflows to maintain water availability in dams. Allocation is a meaningless word if there is no water available yet framers are expected to pay for it even if they do not receive it.

My ability to maintain income was obviously slashed yet water rate prices continued to rise even though we received minimal water. In fact in two years the MIL system received **zero** water allocation yet we still had to pay 100% fixed water charges on our full entitlement. Eventually debt levels got out of control as income did not match expenses and I was **forced** to sell some of my permanent water allocation (commonly known as **willing** sellers by politicians!)

Production costs were increasing and our wheat marketing board was disbanded throwing me onto a grain market where I am now at the mercy of grain traders, hedge funds, future markets and every other thing that rips you off. Life has become tough and our older son who has come home to farm was forced to go mining and be partially on the doll as the farm could not support him and his young wife (their first baby due in April).

Recently a local 150 year old red gum industry was forced to fold up as a national park was thought to be more important than a rural industry supporting our regional community. Community consultation originally led the foresters to believe that they had a future but before the process was complete the NSW State Govt concluded that the city Green preference votes were more important than a sustainable industry. Mistrust in Government process is now firmly entrenched in rural communities.

Now a Murray Darling Basin Plan is about to recommend that up to 50% of my remaining water entitlement will be required for the environment only. People from the city (85% Australia's population) look upon irrigators now as land and water rapists, and a once proud profession is now **unmentionable**. I write in despair as I see my community disintegrating. The golf club about to fold, the tennis club membership halved, empty houses in Deniliquin, increased unemployment and worst of all people giving up and leaving for the already overcrowded cities. **Fortunately** we will stay on our farm as it is unsalable but I feel for my son who is 31 about to be a father. His family rural life is about to begin but what a rotten beginning.

**Why** is rural irrigated Australia within the Murray Darling Basin under attack?

**Why** are we politically expendable? I feel that I am not represented by any party and I cry within and bang the walls with frustration as my profession is constantly blamed for Australia's environmental Murray River problems within the Murray Darling Basin. Are we ignored as we have no voting power and represent very few seats?

The 2007 water act was an environmental act. It does not look for water outside the system that can help it, including new dams. It has no vision of a world that has to increase food production by 100% by 2050. It does not look at Australia water needs as population increases to 40 million by 2050.

**Why** has governments and oppositions have no vision or balls to look to the future apart from emission control and environmental river flows?

**Why** are we the only country in the world that is not protecting its food producers from foreign assaults?

**Why** do I and my family feel so rotten and helpless especially as we feel our farm is actively green and since 1978 has become more environmentally sustainable? We do not want charity or social welfare. Instead we want to feel as though we have an honourable profession and a right to exist in a regional community.

**Why** should we trust any politician when community consultation is ignored and the political process's appears to be a "done deal "with greenie approval?

I sign off with a heavy heart as the rain destroys my best ever crops. I will attempt to sell some of my land so my son and young family can survive because I do believe that one day Australia will see that it needs an irrigated rural and regional industry. More water needs to be harvested and used for food production as well as social and environmental needs.

Yours in hope

Adam Wettenhall