

Submission No: 202
Date Received: 6/12/10
Secretary: SC

RECEIVED
06 DEC 2010

OUR RIVER OUR FUTURE YOUR SAY

Impact of the MDBA Guide to the proposed Basin Plan on Regional Communities.

The Committee Secretary,

Standing Committee on Regional Australia

PO Box 6021

Parliament house,

Canberra ACT . 2600

Submission on the impact of the Murray Darling Basin guide released 8 Oct 2010

Statement

The Murray Darling Basin is a large portion of the States of NSW Victoria and South Australia . It is necessary to achieve a healthy Murray Darling Basin with all interests in the basin taken into account .

All communities within the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan must be assured of security of their future livelihoods . The social and economic implications of potential job losses with the flow on effect on health services . schools and business cannot be ignored .

WATER ACT 2007

There has been much discussion on the requirements of the Water act 2007 and that of its main objective "The Environment ". This environment is very important and affects every area of our lives but the social and economic concerns need equal stance legally to give a fair decision for every group of the community

The environment does not exist in a vacuum and every section of flora and fauna including humans interact and require due consideration .

ENVIRONMENT

Define a healthy river ? Does it flow naturally, go dry in periods of low rainfall ? does it flood in periods of high rainfall ? Should there be more dam,s to increase security for all users. But what affect will more storages have on the environment ? Dams have been constructed previously therefore we already have a managed environment so more dams should be looked at . The Murray should have a more natural flow with the barrages removed from the Murray mouth rather than using environmental water for this purpose.

A healthy river requires management of both land and water not just adding more water to an area . The management of land is not included in the Water Act or in the MDBA terms of reference but land management is vital before any proposed extra water is given to the environment.

All areas of the environment have been badly affected during the 2001—2009 drought not only the 18 Key Environmental Sites in the Guide affected but all pasture areas which rely on rain for growth have suffered .Decisions are being made on how much water is needed using these drought figures which show a predisposition for continual low rainfall and not the wide variations that occur . The present wet period being experienced in the Basin has regenerated the entire landscape more than any Plan can do .A balanced approach therefore must be taken .

Water usage and infrastructure costs.

With the proposed environmental water increases what accountability does this environmental water have ? At present there is no charge on environmental water ? This poses a question :“Who pays for the infrastructure costs with the proposed “cuts “ to irrigation water users. As there will be less water for irrigation use then it follows the charges will go up for irrigators with less water to make a living . The irrigation industry cannot sustain the cost of infrastructure and staff when allocations are to be slashed and reliability reduced . For those that will be able to remain in the industry, (I think many will leave) major outlays equivalent to initial set up costs will be required and only those with sound finances can take on this challenge .

Water Sharing Plans

Water Sharing Plans were prepared in each valley by a group of informed persons of the area with the help of the relevant Government Agencies They took many months to prepare with agreement of all parties affected in the respective Valleys .

During the drought2001-2009 these plans were put on hold with the Water Minister of the day in charge, making decisions on the various river valleys . . The above plans were not really given an opportunity to be fully implemented to see if the decisions for that valley were correct and would benefit all users in that valley (environment , irrigation industry , grazing and farming interests, affects of flooding on farms and towns to name some). These plans are due for review in NSW in 2014 and in Victoria in 2019 . Could these plans be allowed to function till 2014 for all states and reviewed at that date to see where the faults lie in these valleys . This would then allow the work done to date on the MDB validated with figures from each valley tested for affects from the water sharing plans . Figures from the CSIRO Sustainable Yields Study are incorrect for the Macquarie Valley . The Macquarie River is unable to provide the yield as suggested by the Central West Customer Service Committee of State Water . Are the figures correct for other Valleys? I believe they are in question .Therefore these figures should not be used to make decisions on SDL,s and environmental water requirements .

AFFECTS on COMMUNITIES with PROPOSED ‘CUTS’

Rural and regional communities have already made significant adjustments as a result of efficiencies gained from improved farming techniques .These efficiencies have meant fewer jobs in the area . The success of most business operating in rural communities depends on a viable population base .

If the Guide” Cuts “ suggestions of 3000-4000-7000 gigs are to be found for the environment many communities will be badly affected Warren , Deniliquin Coleambally , Bourke and Hillston to name some towns may become welfare dependant or ghost towns with the increase of population drift to larger regional towns or the coastal fringe .With 98% of the Australian population living within 20 km radius of the coast what increased pressure in being imposed on this coastal environment .

Tourism has been suggested as an alternative income producer but this is not a viable option for many’ far flung’ areas. The weather is a factor to consider , road conditions ,the number of facilities available for tourists is limited in the Western areas of NSW . Will tourism return to the communities the income they have enjoyed from agriculture and irrigation and other interconnected industries in the past ? It is doubtful? Yanga Station purchased for \$35million by the State Government in 2005 to replace the red gum industry expected to receive 50,000 visitors a year . To date, \$4.5 million has been spent improving facilities to world class standards,but only under 6000 people were counted visiting for a 6 month period .

If major cuts are made to food and fibre producers the whole supply will be affected , farmers, children, business, schools ,transport operators with a flow on affect . The security of the lives of these people may be in jeopardy .With all the water changes during the past few years uncertainty and changes to water usage and allocations has not encouraged irrigation farmers . Many are worried about their ability to repay debt . Of course this is not in the MDBA,s term of reference but it is an affect on the people in a district . the decline in student wishing to study agricultural base courses has encouted an alarming drop . The further uncertainty in water allocation will only intensify this reduction as the irrigation industry has been one of the few areas where under graduates have been encouraged it as potential career path . Environmental systems in the Basin may rebound quickly, with enough rain , following extended dry periods or major changes in water regimes but regional and rural communities once dislocated take generations to recover.

PRODUCTION of FOOD and FIBRE

ONCE Australia produced food enough for its own people and some to export yet to day we import at least 75% of our food needs .Australia has strict rules about the production of food and fibre particularly its affect on the environment . As a nation we are concerned that our environment is pristine and healthy .Healthy environments can exist in conjunction with sound farming practices and regional towns. As Australians we also pride ourselves on the quality of our food and fibre and the care that is taken to ensure that this can continue for generations to come . While producing food to import to Australia what is happening to the environment of these countries who are producing these commodities? Do they have controls, standards set as in Australia or are they destroying their environment to produce food for export to Australia ? We live in a global Village so *caring for the environment concerns the world,s people and destruction of environments elsewhere in the world will affect our environment too .*

Australia is an island country and as such is vulnerable if it isn’t able to at least produce food and fibre enough for its population . Food security surely is vital for Australia.

Food prices are due to increase . With increased pressure on food prices this will ultimately create problems for all Australians .

GROUND WATER

Ground water has already had substantial cuts which were 3 years ago acceptable to Government now more cuts are proposed .Again insecurity and fear on producers part that they will not be able to service debt, put crop in and pay family needs with the lesser production and higher costs.

FINANCE

With all the changes to water distribution and availability many are concerned about the value of their properties now and their ability to borrow money . Problems servicing debt and the destruction of equity of both financial institutions and business owner sis a concern to many . This is not a worry of the MDBA but it is a worry for communities awaiting the outcome of proposed changes in the Guide . I believe rural Australian producers will be greatly disaffected if the Plan goes ahead in its present form .

The idea of a basin plan is an excellent one but it must be correct in its assumptions backed up with correct tested science and be for the good of all users .

SUMMARY

- 1 the environment is very important but the social and economic concerns need to be given equal legal status to give a air outcome to all the groups in the basin.
- 2.The use of correct data considering the Water Sharing Plans already prepared with local input knowledge and agreement
- 3.Consideration of the changed water regime affects on communities especially those built on the irrigation industry .
4. Concern that South Australia expects too much water from the northern rivers to the detriment of the environmental water needed in these areas.

Please consider our concerns when looking towards decisions which will affect all groups living in the MDB.

Campbell Partnership