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House of Reps. Standing Committee on Regional Australia.  
P.O.Box 6021,  
Parliament House, Canberra. A.C.T. 2600.

Re the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

I write as a gravely concerned Basin citizen, concerned that the current M.D.B.A's Plan for saving the so called stressed river systems, is an outrageous and blatantly one sided view and clearly not in the Basin's or national interest.

Whilst agreeing whole heartedly with the national need to re allocate our most limited natural resource, WATER, to meet the nation's requirement to sustain itself, the assertion that the environment comes "first and second", is an insult to the "man in the street" and defies "common sense".

We inhabit the driest continent and most, even if you have only read history books, Australian poetry or followed the treks of our early explorers, are aware that since year dot our environment has suffered from drought, flooding rains, grasshopper plagues etc., our country is a place of extremes.

Farmers in general , irrigation farmers in particular, have been targeted as the culprits for over extraction, yet those providers of food and fibre **can only produce irrigated commodities when Governments make water available, they are not in a position to help themselves as and when they see fit.**

As a long time ricegrower, I haven't been able to grow a crop for four years, simply because Government has not provided me the water to do so! Farmers do not create water shortages, drought does.

Science is the tool those in authority continue to serve up as the means of determining what should and can be done. Yet for every figure that states this should be done another has the opposite view. For example—not very long ago Bob Brown stated that it had been scientifically proven that 1500 G.Ls were required to restore river health in the Basin. Simon Crean, shortly after, agreed. Now we are being told 7000 G.Ls. are required.

Some suggestions that your Committee should consider are as follows.

1. the decision on the appropriate SDLs should be arrived at by applying equal consideration to social, economic and environmental issues.
2. aspects of the Water Act must be re appraised. Included in this are the components detailing the "precautionary principle" and the "risk factor" re compensation for lost water entitlements. When combined, they provide any Government an "escape clause" not to provide real and meaningful compensation to those whose assets and livelihoods will be effected.

3. it is totally unfair that irrigators / irrigator businesses should bear the total cost of redistribution---any fair minded Australian would deem it appropriate that all sectors contribute, be they townies or other business operators.

4 much of the drive that comes from the environmentalists, stems from the declaration that Ramsar sites should be enhanced/ protected and all international agreements honoured. Ramsar Convention does not stipulate that once largely estuarine sites such as the Lower Lakes and Cooroong , have to be maintained by persistent flooding with FRESH WATER, Common sense would tell it would be in the best interest of the people of this nation to return these icon sites to estuarine (by removing the barrages) and save that massive quantity of fresh water so that it could be used more profitably in the Basin for producing food and fibre, not only for our own people but also, to contribute in some way to solve the starvation problems in many other countries.

5.4. recently we have learnt Australia is now a nett importer of food and grocery items. How ridiculous! To remove from the Basin, via severe reduction in water entitlements, its current capacity to produce 40% of the nations food and fibre will clearly result in the need for further imports. How incongruous!

The Report has been galling to read and difficult to fathom the logic. Food production and the livelihoods of inhabitants is like Defence, a national necessity. Its importance necessitates the utmost of honest and sensitive scrutiny. The current plan does not demonstrate this.

I urge this Committee to re think the whole process, to do otherwise will be seen as irresponsible and lacking in national endeavour.

Yours faithfully

Knox Durrant