



12th December 2010-12-12

Tony Windsor MP
P.O. Box 963
Tamworth NSW 2340

Sent by Email:

Re: Submission Regarding Murray Darling Basin Plan

Dear Tony,

I would like the following submission regarding the MDBP, to you personally as my Local Member and also for forwarding as a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee.

Personal Background

I was born in Barmera SA in 1955 and spent until 1972 growing up in the Riverland of SA. Whilst perhaps being regarded as a "Townie" and not physically living on the land my family and personal background was inter-woven with the local community and life on and about the River Murray. The punts at Kingston, Blanchetown, Berri and replacement of these with bridges plus day to day life of irrigation and fruit growing ie irrigated horticulture remain foremost with me today. I earned my first \$ serving the tourist trade on Lake Bonney Barmera. Having completed secondary schooling I then went on to study and become a Civil Engineer. Construction works on the Blanchetown and Kingston bridges formed the catalyst of my professional passion and in fact I have subsequently in my professional life I have had an association with a further 4 Murray crossings.

As a child , I recall Donald Campbell attempting to set a world water speed record on Lake Bonney, plus the use of the lake for all things aqua. Personally I gained experience in all things ie swimming, sailing Water-skiing boating etc. This extended from the Riverland to the Coorong and fishing at the Murray Mouth.

Given the passage of time and in my professional career, I have travelled extensively from North Queensland, Central Qld and NW NSW Victoria and of course SA.

Some History

Paddle steamers were the main method of transport up until the 1940's and I recall being on the last PS Marion service in 1966. Commencing approximately 1920 a series of locks were constructed to provide constant pool levels on the River. Prior to this the river levels varied from flood to drought. The book "Men of the River Murray" details the trials and tribulations of river navigation and provides anecdotal evidence of passages made up over the Qld NSW border, to the inability to navigate the main reaches of the river. Specifically I recall photographs of a wheat crop growing on the bottom of Lake Bonney in the early 1900's (1912 I believe).

Sturt in 1836 rowed his boat into Lake Bonney.

My earliest childhood memories include the end of the 1956 floods. At around this time the Snowy scheme and the Hume Dam became part of the scheme followed by the Dartmouth dam in the 1970's.

The bottom line of this is that water levels in the Murray were never constant until the intervention of man. Specifically from approx 1960 with the Hume and Snowy Scheme coming online, the flow in the Murray was able to be manipulated by man.

Views and Outlook

As a child growing in the Riverland up I recall the furrow irrigation technology employed at the time and classmates absent due to having to assist with "having the water every 4-6 weeks". I can say that I have witnessed a great change in this respect in that drip irrigation is now the norm and the open channels have been replaced with pipe. In fact I would say that the Riverland SA has led the way in this regard.

Having witnessed the huge plantings of grapes and irrigated cotton, I personally made a prediction in the mid 1990's that we would come to where we are today in regards sustainability of the MDB.

Yes, I still have a huge passion for the Murray and particularly so in that SA is at the end of the line. The system has been raped and pillaged by a succession of self interested State Governments and poorly focussed Federal Governments pandering to political expediencies.

In 2007 when SA growers were facing cuts back to 15% entitlements, I personally witnessed substantial new almond plantings being installed between Narrandera and Hay and water being applied to irrigated cereal plantings (travelling irrigator overhead application).

Furthermore SA was faced with particular problems in that the Salinity levels at Morgan (the Morgan Whyalla pipeline) and Mannum (Mannum – Adelaide pipeline) were critical to the point that Lake Bonney was cut off from the system. Meanwhile commercially promoted wetlands were afforded priority.

Meanwhile the upstream states did their own thing including a situation at Albury where an enterprise took good water from the Murray and replaces it with very salty groundwater thus creating additional salinity for downstream users .

What Needs to Happen – My Opinion

- The powers of the MDB must be absolute and the Fiefdoms and Fiefdoms of STATE CONTROL need to be over-riden in totality. It is not fair that long established irrigation areas suffer from over exploitation from more recent upstream moves.
- Advice of the Environmental Lobby needs to be tempered with historical facts including the fact that the MDB system has just experienced a 1 in 100 year drought event (or more severe). It seems that these people would like to launch the boat at a constant river level rather than accept the process of nature.
- Given the recent resignation of the MDB Chair and his comments regarding sustainability of the legislation, the legislation needs to be confirmed above relying on the promises of over-stretched political whips. The issue has been raised and I cannot understand why it is has not been dealt with and pursued to a logical conclusion.
- A lot of water rights have been issued by weak state governments even to the point of defining extraction limits based on dubious minimum river flow conditions. These were a political back room deal made to benefit the “Born to Rule” members of society. Effectively these water rights were effectively stolen from the wider Public based on technicalities approved by weak Public Servants and Politicians. Cases such as this should be pursued and perhaps overall be more severely penalised according to the timing, basis and weakness in the argument for an entitlement at the expense of more genuine and long term users
- The allocations so derived should be reviewed and adjusted in terms of history and use per Ha as was historically applicable to the area. The notion that lucerne production in a 600mm rainfall area can be improved from 3 to 4 cuts per annum by applying a further 600mm of irrigation is clearly not a sustainable option. Similarly the growth of cotton where it would grow dry-land with a similar reliability to the wheat-belts of the SA Mallee and the Hay Plains. Sure, however, those involved are reaping the profits of an un-sustainable use of water. Perhaps a formula could be worked out based on tracking actual Rainfall and reducing entitlements and carry-overs in good years, keeping additional water in storage for release in poorer years.
- Contributions of salinity need to be reduced aka the business at Albury
- Off-Stream storage needs to be monitored. These are vey proliferate viz flying Sydney to Adelaide following the Murray. This is a Water Hog mentality where firstly extraction is only measured ex storage and the Public miss out on the evaporation losses and users do not pay for the amount actually taken from the system. What happened in the last 2 years was that these upstream Water Hogs took the water, paid for less than what was taken from the river (and how was this monitored??), wasted it in evaporation to the detriment of lower river horticultural operators who had to lop plantings to survive due to wholesale cuts in allocation.(or pay the price to buy water). **THINK THE SYSTEM IS FAIR, I THINK NOT.**
- A better model of managing water supply ex major dams needs to be implemented. The fact that established plantings were lopped/removed is not acceptable whilst I personally witnessed the new plantings made during this same time (eg the almonds between Hay and Narrandera). Perhaps an earlier reduction of entitlements more gradually applied along with revised dam management practices would avoid recent drama's in that a certain base supply could be maintained. Admittedly the system had faced a 1 in 100 year drought event or worse.
- There are parts of the system where improved distribution and irrigation technologies will deliver significant savings which can be clawed back from irrigators and applied to Environmental Flows. However, it is also reasonable that in this situation the irrigators should receive a better supply

security regime as compensation albeit subject to the point made directly above. In times of drought as has been traditional for the system security of supply should be at the dis-benefit of the environment. Tony, in this respect, I refer to the Tamworth drought situation where the existing Dungowan pipeline was inadequate and 50ML per day were being released from Chaffey to provide 20ML down river at Tamworth water Supply versus an adequate pipeline.

- Who can afford the cuts?. Perhaps across the board if a small overall concession say 5% could be gained **voluntarily** (and at a markup to the value of their existing holdings at latter purchase value ie donate 5% your entitlement, any latter buy out increases by the same) from Irrigators this would show their very genuine concern for welfare of the MDB. This is in addition to issues identified above about “Water Hogs” and poorly won concessions and entitlements. Alternatively lesser term users are penalised more than long time traditional users. Similarly perhaps high security uses should be confined to animal and human welfare and in times of crises a model be developed to cut “normal” entitlements in accord with drought management levels to the benefit of more long term uses. I also put forward a case where in terms of an identifiable drought forecast situation “marginal” use situations are progressively restricted (not on/off decision making). For example rice has been grown in Australia for many years (I recall seeing the system 1964 personally) and in times of plentiful supply this can be catered for. However, there is no sense in sustaining this when times turn bad albeit the effect on the communities involved. Similarly irrigation used on marginal dry-land cotton farming – it benefits few at the expense of the majority. The cycle of Good/Drought needs to be recognised by the wider Australian community.
- Predictions of the “Southern Oscillation Index – Elnino/LaNino” are becoming more refined along with better medium weather forecasting technology. When a bad pattern is recognised before hand (as the last one was) this can be applied as progressive reduction over time rather than an all/now philosophy as appears to have been adopted in recent times.
- This a personal question to Tony Windsor MP. Tony, where you live and farm (apart from stock bores) has been totally based upon natural rainfall and your predictions as a skilled farmer. That is a given and “Base Case” for any agricultural operator in Australia. Tony, please let people know of the hard decisions you have made as a “Cereal/Feed/Sheep/Cow” (and off farm income cocky). Please also comment on the various investment Based/Tax Dodge” aka Pitt/Rundle/Bourke/Macquarie and other famous Capital City streets) investment farming and as well as the emerging carbon and water postulators driven by a lot of legal advice without any actual hands on farming practicality. Some of these “guys” are the problem that is faced, in that an ROI must be maintained rather than one based on Seasons and Reason. Sorry Mr Main Street Capital Street farmer, when it goes bad, you share your turn with everyone else rather than mounting and obtaining legally and politically based Main Street concessions as really you are no different to anyone else in the industry. If it is anyone who has to suffer “unfair cuts” it is this type of “main Street”operator rather than the genuine long term operator.

Regards

Peter Gill