



I am an individual who works and lives in the town of Hay. I would like to comment on the human impact that the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, if implemented, will have on the township of Hay. I grew up in Hay and moved back here in 2005 to help bring up my step-son and look after my recently widowed mother. I had a good, well paying job, enough to support a family. In 2005, Hay was in the grip of drought yet seemed to be thriving. Population figures were good, house prices rising and confidence existed within the town. Numbers in all three schools were high, Hay was a vibrant, thriving economy.

In 2007-8 water buybacks came into effect and farmers started selling their water. The knock-on effects from this have been dramatic. They include:

- declining population in the rural sector and in the town of Hay itself;
- declining numbers in the schools resulting in loss of teaching staff, administrative staff and grounds staff. Hay Public School for example has declined from a student population of 369 in 2006 to a projected enrolment number of 218 in 2011;
- loss of jobs within the town due to the declining population;
- decline of house prices and devaluation of property;
- a large number of houses remaining empty and 'For Sale', many being on the market for over three years;
- lack of confidence in the future for our children who may want to stay in Hay;
- lack of opportunities for our youth to remain living in the township of Hay;
- businesses struggling to make end meet and having to lay off staff;
- Council reducing their numbers of staff on the payroll;
- families separated through the main breadwinner seeking employment opportunities elsewhere (eg in the mines); and
- issues in mental health, depression, suicides and the break down of the family unit are on the increase as a direct result of hardships faced around loss of employment, financial pressures, etc

Further buybacks under the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan will continue to plunge Hay in this downward spiral to the point that the whole town will be absolutely decimated. With the better than average rainfall that has recently fallen, confidence should be high again in our town. It's not. People are worried and people continue to leave. Hay has a unique community. Having lived in many other places, it's hard to find what Hay has to offer in the way of community. It's a great place to raise a family, it's a wonderful place for the elderly and a supportive place for singles. It offers a laid back lifestyle that many people seek away from the city or larger regional centres.

Hay relies heavily on irrigation to support employment in the town. Instead of buying the water from our growers, grants should be offered to farmers to investigate and set up irrigation practices that are less water intensive. Incentives for reducing water usage could also be offered. Universities could set up campuses in rural communities to educate growers in the latest in water-saving irrigation methods.

Another way of increasing the populations in rural towns is for government sectors to employ people to work in rural communities. Back in the 70s Hay employed many government workers in the Department of Public Works, Lands Department, etc. It was a 'gp ahead' town back then. In this age of technology there is ample opportunity to decentralise services into these rural towns. Hay certainly has opportunities for employees in Community Services, Centrelink, etc and the townspeople would welcome an increase in government services into the town.

Please acknowledge the receipt of my submission via return email.

Thanking you,

Carol Oataway