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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Regional Australia
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Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

**Submission to the Inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan on
Regional Australia**

I note that the Committee's Terms of Reference is to "inquire into and report on the socio-economic impact of the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Authority's 'Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan' (the Proposed Basin Plan) on regional communities".

[<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ra/murraydarling/tor.htm>]

I further note that the "Guide to the proposed Basin Plan" does not specifically mention the Clarence River.

[http://download.mdba.gov.au/Guide_to_the_Basin_Plan_Volume_1_web.pdf]

However, there has been much public comment, including submissions made to this Standing Committee, in relation to water transfers being made from other basins, including that of the Clarence River.

Hence, this submission is submitted with the prime objective of opposing any suggestions that water transfers be made from the Clarence River.

The Clarence River and its many tributaries are an important ecosystem that has over time already suffered too many human-related adverse events. Consequently, it is in a somewhat degraded condition and is struggling to survive and fulfill the functions it would by way of nature perform.

The view that I hold in relation to any proposals to extract water from the Clarence River can be stated unequivocally. I state categorically that it is totally inappropriate to consider any further extractions of water from the Clarence River's catchment area.

The area is a natural ecosystem - it provides a vital habitat for flora and fauna that occupy it. From its sources through to its mouth, the Clarence River is a dynamic

living thing. Its diversity ranges from freshwater that enters it at its various sources through to saltwater in its estuary.

The Clarence River's survival as a vital part of a healthy, living habitat has already been threatened enough. It can not stand any further human intervention of the type that would be associated with proposals that are in the public arena and are being associated with this Inquiry. Any such intervention has the ingredients to ruin the river by doing irreparable damage to it.

As a non-indigenous Australian I state that I am of the firm belief that greater understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal culture is a significant and necessary component in achieving Reconciliation in our nation. Any proposals that have the potential to impact upon the lands of the traditional custodians of the Clarence Valley must involve thorough consultation with the relevant indigenous community members and organisations.

Present day human occupancy in the Clarence Valley ranges from sole inhabitants, hamlets and villages at the lower end of the demographic scale through to larger service centres and a regional city. The process of local population growth has undoubtedly impacted upon the river and its surrounds and while that growth has not always been harmonious and compatible with the natural environment local communities have generally endeavoured to maintain a positive and healthy environment.

It is not an understatement to say that the Clarence River is the "life and soul" of the Clarence Valley.

The Clarence Valley is both a natural and cultural feature. The physical geographical aspects of the river are the major drawing points for the cultural activities that have developed within close proximity of it. Hence, the Valley with its relatively small but growing population can be sustained provided stringent controls about further developments along its reaches remain in place.

Governments at all levels have responsibilities to ensure that the changing demographics of the Valley can be sustained in its natural environment. By and large, governments and their agencies have in the past acted responsibly and acted as guardians of the Valley.

Regrettably, the same comment can not be made about governments in other areas/regions where urban, agricultural, mining and industrial expansion has exceeded the capacity of local environments to handle the additional burdens those features have created.

One only has to look at other drainage basins, including the Murray-Darling, to see the problems that are being experienced because excessive and unsustainable population growth and economic activity have placed inordinate demands upon the natural environments. That growth has occurred whilst there has been noticeable and not insignificant lack of forethought and planning associated with the capacity of

the existing resources in those areas to meet the demands that should have been anticipated.

The communities of the Clarence Valley have developed an economic base that is heavily dependent upon the continuation of a healthy river. Among the activities that successfully operate in the Valley and are reliant on a healthy river are agricultural land uses, forestry, fishing, shipping and, of course, tourism and the myriad of activities associated with it.

The Clarence River, which is colloquially referred to as "The Big River", has acquired and maintained an excellent reputation and thus is the major draw card for the Valley. Placing the river's healthy survival in jeopardy has major negative multiplier effects for the entire Valley's community.

All-year-round prosperity in the Valley relies upon continuous strong economic performances in local primary industries and significant seasonal boosts to the service and hospitality sector. Without the continued success of local industry and seasonally-oriented services the viability of other sectors of the services portfolio of the Valley are endangered. Health, education, housing and transport services rely on the existence of a healthy local economy and to damage the Clarence River has the potential to deter further local environmentally-friendly and sustainable investment.

The citizens of the Clarence Valley have every right to expect to continue to live in an area where its communities' members acknowledge and appreciate its significant natural features. The communities should be able to sustain and grow themselves in a manner that does so in harmony with their natural surrounds.

Any further extraction of water from the Clarence River is simply too much of a risk for the Valley to face. The Valley should not be required to pay a price for inappropriate and over zealous developments elsewhere.