



Memorandum

To House Standing Committee on Regional Australia
From Ruth Trigg
Re Windsor Inquiry into the impact of the MDB Plan in Regional Australia
Date 20 December 2010-12-20

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Summary

- Have I commented on some or all of the terms of reference?

My submission discusses issues that I believe have not been incorporated sufficiently into the terms of reference. I am analysing deep structural issues and interpretation of the problems facing the management of the MDB Plan and its implementation

- Have I provided a summary of the submission at the front (for lengthy submissions)?

I am presenting five problems and suggestions for their solution

- Have I provided my return address and contact details with the submission?

Yes

- If the submission contains confidential information, have I made this clear at the front?

The submission is not confidential

- Have I provided an electronic version of the submission (if possible)?

The submission was by email.

Submission in two parts

Part 1

Proposing a new model for consultation and community engagement.

A citizens forum – a forum of 15 - 20 of the best water knowledge people in Australia with big picture capacity, long term vision, on-the-ground deep knowledge, community consultation insight and expertise.

This committee will meet in Canberra, and invite the state and federal water ministers, state DENR HOD equivalents to come and sit in the outer tier with listening rights only.

This Citizens forum will set a procedural agenda where the hierarchy of problems, issues and tasks are identified, their interconnectivity identified, the workable solutions around them worked through, the resources to support the solutions identified, the implementation of the solutions described.

Part 2

Analysis

What are the problems?

How can they be addressed – what are solutions?

Resources to address problems

Problem 1

It is illogical to present to the communities of the MDB the task of restructuring downwards to deal with the expansion and over-allocation (not drought) of irrigation over the past 15 years, while at the same time celebrating the rapid expansion of mining and other ventures, such as energy extraction (coal seam gas) in other places of Australia.

There is a logical inconsistency here. The whole world is facing the task of dealing with catastrophic futures with climate change, and yet Australian minerals are being extracted in a frenzy of excitement that is obscene when considering the effects of increased manufacturing on climate issues. Also, the obscenely destructive processes on the Australian environment and water tables of coal seam gas extraction for expanded energy use here and overseas needs to be examined in terms of responsible action for the future of Australia and all Australians, with environmental considerations the prior and most important criteria, not short-term economic gain

All of this ‘development’ is predicated on the rightness of the shareholder to increase ‘paper’ wealth.

The ‘lifestyle’ changes in western economies post WW2 are treated as a ‘right’, and indulgent living practices, beyond any level of necessity in energy and product use, are occurring in a way that directly threatens the future viability of the planet.

The language and practice of 'economics', the dominant rights of the 'shareholder' are so deeply infused into the cultural fabric of meaning that the conditions on which future living for all species is based, a healthy environment, is relegated as a secondary, and disconnected, consideration. This illogic of priority, and the illogic of disconnection, is embedded in the principles of this enquiry, and thus make the work of the enquiry redundant (can only lead to systemic failure) until these priorities are reversed and until the connections are restored. Anything else is a waste of time.

Problem 2

The problem of disconnecting the parts from the whole.

'will inquire into and report on the socio-economic impact'.

The socio-economic has been disconnected from the main problem, an extensive water system (The MDB) which is at the point of collapse. The health of the whole, connected rivers system must be maintained as the prior consideration **before, not equivalent with**, the socio-economic impact.

This is a problem analysis and solving process which needs to employ logic.

This problem-solving process acknowledges the cultural analysis of science and its interaction within communities, both expert and lay communities, where linguistic and thinking structures validate a dominant logic model of the parts being disconnected from the whole. This model of thinking and analysis (of separating the parts from the whole) is dominant in western economies, but that does not validate its capacity for effective problem analysis and problem solving.

The 'socio-economic' is implicated deeply in the practice of deeply flawed, but extensive and persuasive logical analysis, because communities throughout the MDB know the section of the system they live in work in, and draw water from, but they lack knowledge of the workings and needs of the whole system. They lack knowledge of the connection of the whole system, and the ways the health of one part of the system directly affects the health of all other parts.

A particular lack of knowledge throughout the communities along the whole system is the significance of the workings of the end stage of the system. Here, at the great Southern Lakes, water must carry two million tonnes salt a year out of the system to the sea for the rest of the system to stay healthy.

Proposed solution to Problem 2

An educational program about the nature and workings of the whole system must be developed. This program must be resourced so that all communities involved in future decision-making about the MDB engage with this program to the extent that current, regional, parochial knowledge about the river system is changed to a 'whole of river system' understanding.

This program requires professional curriculum developers with deep experience in transformational educational practice to deliver this outcome.

Problem 3

Before communities in regions are asked to consider future developments and transformations in their communities, a working 'map' of the whole MDB for the past 15 years must be developed and made available to all communities.

The first purpose of creating this working map is to show

- how much the areas under irrigation have increased during the past 15 years
- what crops: fibres, grains, foods and so on have been planted over the areas during the past 15 years
- what water has been extracted
- what water has been licensed
- what water has been held, stored, sequestered
- what the rainfall patterns have been
- what is grown for Australian use, export, what is wasted
- what the relationship with what is grown in the MDB is to overseas patterns
- what alternative fibres, grains, foods are possible and viable

This map will be a significant resource for dealing with Problem 2.

Proposed solution to problem 3

Provide the resources, which must be transparent and independent, to develop this map, disseminate it, and educate participants at all levels, in communities, governments and corporations, in its application for analysis for future transformational work towards the health of the whole system.

Problem 4

There exist significant socio-economic-political forces to prevent the development of the map outlined in problem 3. These forces are the power and control of large companies, local and overseas, MISs, whose main task is to increase shareholder wealth. This focus disconnects any ethical responsibility to consider the health of the whole MDB. By withholding the knowledge outlined in Problem 3, these companies work to control markets and to gain access to resources such as water without considering the whole effects of their access and use of the water, on the land and on the river systems.

This is an economic-political problem which has not been described. If this problem is not described and if actions are not taken at a federal level of management to put the health of the river system before shareholder 'entitlements', then the task of asking communities to shoulder the work of change and transformation is a deep fraud. The wrong problem is being addressed as the 'main' problem, and no effective solution for the future can come from this flawed analysis and process.

Proposed solution to Problem 4

All corporations, owners, MIS schemes, be named, and the actions of these groups with commercial interest in the access and use of water in the whole system be made available for public knowledge.

Problem 5

Communicating with communities.

There is already in place a practice of 'consultation' and 'communication' with communities which is deeply entrenched, intractable, contemptuous, and in every way not acceptable, because it

- sees the process of communication with communities as an imposition and intrusion on practices of power and control
- lacks respect for the local knowledge over, in many cases, many generations
- retains power and control in the hands of the government agencies
- has already determined the 'solutions'
- will not listen in a genuine way to the concerns, questions, or proposals developed by groups in the community
- is not transparent in considering knowledge and proposals presented by groups in a community
- seeks to appropriate the knowledge and proposals developed in community forums and by community groups without proper respect or acknowledgement
- acts to 'reward' sections of community to 'gain' and 'maintain' power within a community; and through these practices acts as a divisive, not transformative agency
- rewards through inappropriate financing some schemes which are not fully thought through; and which end up being counter-productive or worsening the environmental conditions
- rewards people inappropriately by 'awards'
- withholds scientific reports from citizens, which they are entitled to have access to in a democracy
- causes significant loss of faith in the supposed democratic system and process
- causes, through this loss of faith in open communication and democratic processes, significant assault on individual and community health and well-being. This point cannot be emphasised too strongly
- creates cultures of secrecy and lack of transparency which distort democratic process and open, transparent sharing of knowledge
- creates cultures of power and communication whose main focus is not the work of advocating for a healthy river system, but whose main focus is retaining perceived power and control. The overwhelming reality of this state of affairs cannot be overstated
- creates the perception, within the community, following from the above, that corrupt practices flourish within these entrenched cultures of power, lack of transparency, and control.

Proposed solution to problem 5

There are at least two stages which are necessary in addressing and solving Problem 5

Firstly, that this problem exists to a depth which significantly threatens the success of future community communication and negotiation.

This problem needs to be described and acknowledged and practices need to change so that they are transparent and accountable. This requires an enormous cultural shift within government departments and agencies.

Secondly, new practitioners need to be brought in to the work of engaging with communities. These people need to have knowledge and experience in the process of transformational learning. They need to be educators with broad experience in bringing about cultural change.

A pattern for this work is to

- acknowledge what a community knows and what it can do. This becomes the substantial platform which future change is developed from
- acknowledge the capability of the members of the community as already being effective agents of change (they are, in many aspects of their lives and history)
- provide the necessary knowledge for the community to do the current work (see 'map' above)
- offer the work to the community as exciting, transformational work for the future, where their real contribution is accepted and valued
- provide high quality assistance in imaging new prospects at all levels of community generation – youth, workers, ageing, educational, recreational, health, land and rivers care, energy use, architecture, shared community assets, transport, food...
- link the transformational work with other knowledge communities, across the whole MDB, across Australia, around the world. This work is current work for the whole world
- understand that much of this transformational work is achieved through the interactivity of high quality, transparent, accessible, science and communication and knowledge practices developed in the arts, such as narrative, story telling, drama, visual arts

Citizens know this kind of transformational work has to take place. They are ahead of the politicians in deeply understanding this. They have a huge untapped commitment to high quality change and change processes. The imaginative outcomes from different communities can inform other communities. This work in itself can restore health and well-being in communities just by the healthy activity of the engagement and by seeing the benefits of the outcomes.

Meaning is changed from acquiring manufactured goods to engaging in healthy, community solutions to new world challenges about the environment as a whole living system.