



The Inquiry into the Impact of the MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN in regional Australia

- A Submission on the socio-economic impact of the proposed Murray Darling Basin Authority's Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan on regional communities.

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To;
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INTRODUCTION

This submission is made by the Murray Irrigators Support Group, MISG, which was formed in 2008 to support farmers during drought.

MISG collectively pools resources with a range of regionally focused organisations and the irrigation industry, Government and irrigators who collaborate to help improve the effective and efficient use of water within the irrigation industry.

The Murray Darling Basin is a key factor in Australia's ecological health, containing some of the country's most diverse and rich natural environments it occupies about one million square kilometres, and has a population of just over two million people.

We strongly urge the Federal Government to adopt a balanced approach to the development of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

We ask that the same consideration being given to the environment is applied to the social and economic impacts of the two million people who make up our regional and rural communities.

ISSUES

The proposed SDL's in the Guide to the Murray Darling Basin Plan has placed little consideration on the social and economic impacts on our regional and rural communities.

Nor do they address the drastic effects the proposed cuts to water allocations will have on these communities which need to be defined and included.

The "science" and use of unrealistic models, which haven't taken into consideration or included the small regional and rural communities which make up the Murray Darling Basin.

The limited consultation and engagement process with the blatant disregard for regional and rural communities and businesses.

The 800 Job losses figure is unrealistic.

Equal consideration should have been given to the impacts on the farming community and the flow on effects to farming related industries, businesses and regional and rural communities.

The water savings achieved through the Northern Victorian Irrigation Renewal Project Modernisation infrastructure program have not been addressed.

The impact of fixed charge for the delivery of water with fewer irrigators to pay for the maintenance and infrastructure

To initiate an investigation into the ecological benefits now evident from the recent floods and how these benefits will apply to the MDBP.

It is imperative that the appropriate research into the social and economic impacts on our regional and rural communities be undertaken immediately.

We 'say no' to cuts to water allocations without this critical information.

A Summary of the direct and indirect impact of the Proposed Basin Plan on:

Regional communities

Loss of community members, volunteers, job losses
Devaluation of farms and vacant houses in our towns

Lack of confidence in retaining businesses in their community
Inability to attract new businesses to regional and rural communities

The flow on effects it will have on our schools hospitals and other services

Suicide
Marriage breakdown
Mental health issues
Poverty

Can farmers continue to run a viable farm business

Generational farmers having to walk off their farms and seek employment elsewhere

Farming families having to supplement their income off farm

The impact of fixed charge for the delivery of water with fewer irrigators to pay for the maintenance and infrastructure

Stress, stress, stress related illnesses

Unable to sustain sporting teams

Sporting facilities left idle

Even less incentive for our youth to stay regional

Lenders not investing in mortgages in rural communities

Our regional and rural communities becoming ghost towns

A Summary of the direct and indirect impact of the Proposed Basin Plan on:

Agricultural industries

Lack of confidence in the industry

Lack of confidence to expand or develop agricultural industries with the uncertainties of the MDBP looming over them.

In the precast irrigation industry sales are uncertain and the future is unpredictable.

With a reduction in irrigation is the manufacture of irrigation equipment a viable industry.

Half the pre cast irrigation manufacturers have closed their doors in recent years reflecting the decline in irrigated agriculture.

Inability to afford additional labour

Impact of longer working hours

The impact on Australian food production

No farmers in Australia means no Australian food

Australia has the potential to feed the world and with a world food shortage this should be a priority

The lack of the quality of overseas food,

Introduction of pests and disease into our food production

Banks not investing in agricultural industries

Banks foreclosing on agricultural industries

Local business activity

Loss of businesses in our regional and rural communities

Loss of business cash flow

Lack of available skilled workers

lack of employee pool

Lack of confidence to expand or develop with the uncertainties of the MDBP looming over them

A large percentage of our customers are farming related no customers no business.

Devaluation of business

More shops vacant,

Banks not investing in local businesses

Banks foreclosing on local businesses

Bankruptcy

A Summary of the direct and indirect impact of the Proposed Basin Plan on:

Community wellbeing

Loss of community members, families the breakdown of the fibre which makes up our small communities.

The lack of confidence in retaining businesses in their community.

The flow on effects it will have on our schools with fewer children less teachers, less facilities.

Hospitals with fewer doctors, nurses and other health related services.

Suicide is on the rise in our regional and rural communities, it will be someone we know.

Coping with marriage breakdown's
Mental health issues due to a new wide range of social and economic issues.

Generational farmers having to walk off their farms and seek employment elsewhere.

Farming families having to supplement their income off farm.

Parents now not at home to look after their children.

Stress, stress and stress related illnesses.

Unable to sustain sporting teams, lack of exercise and social interaction causing obesity, diabetes and depression.

Sporting facilities becoming unused abandoned.

Difficulties accessing income support due to rural location, pride.

Limited income, families making difficult decisions.

Options for water-saving measures

Surface Irrigation is the largest water user in the country and approximately 70% of the nation's water used is for irrigation and of this 80% is Surface Irrigation.

1. Fast Watering Technology

Also called low energy irrigation has been recognised by the Government's On-Farm irrigation efficiency programme stage one and is effective on pipe and riser and gravity irrigation layouts. Trials of over 500 farms have shown that the faster the water is applied to the bay, the less water is used.

Higher flows can easily be achieved by using the channels as storage.

This form of Irrigation is effective on specific soil types and farm layouts as it uses less water and produces more crops.

2. Soil Moisture Monitoring Equipment

Soil Moisture Monitoring equipment for scheduling irrigators has become an essential tool in low energy fast watering irrigation. Soil moisture monitoring equipment provides a tool that enables irrigators to make more informed decisions regarding the water requirements of various crops.

Demonstration sites have been established and SMM equipment has been installed across a range of crop types including permanent pasture, annual pasture, winter/summer cropping and Lucerne. This can result in significant on-farm water efficiency gains and increased productivity.

3. Automation

Automatic irrigation controllers open and close bay outlets and channel stops in Surface Irrigation giving precise control which will save water.

The units will operate the stops either at a predetermined time or at a predetermined distance along the bay.

Options for water-saving measures

4. Government funded programs

Like the On Farm Efficiency Program and the NVIRP modernisation program gives farmers the options to improve their irrigation layouts for maximum water application efficiency and distribution efficiency.

Landowners are often concerned that losses in their open channel systems form a significant part of the overall farm irrigation efficiency.

As a result major investments have been made in converting to pipelines or lining of channels.

Distribution efficiency is the ratio of water delivered to the field compared to water delivered to the farm gate.

5. Crop Diversity

Farmers are going away from summer pastures which require more watering and diversifying into other crops which need less water such as annual rye grasses and clover combinations as their autumn crops and summer crops such as maize and sorghum which require less watering.

The amount of produce grown varies enormously with different species of crops particularly perennials, summer grown crops compared to annual autumn grown crops.

6. Decommissioned irrigation land

Farmers are choosing not to water unviable land and to diversify into other industries such as planting to trees to assist in the carbon sequestration for carbon credits and other non irrigated industries.

The role of governments, the agricultural industry and the research sector in developing and delivering infrastructure and technologies aimed at supporting water-efficiency within the Murray-Darling Basin.

Initiate an investigation into the ecological benefits now evident from the recent floods on the Murray Darling Basin.

Initiate a feasibility study into construction of an environmental dam.

Construct an environmental dam to store environmental water.

Initiate a positive marketing campaign of our country people, no farmers mean no Australian food.

The Federal Government needs to invest in on farm infrastructure, water saving innovations and the research and development into water saving methodologies.

The Federal Government need to make a greater financial investment in the Northern Victorian Irrigation Renewal Project to ensure the maximum water savings can be returned to the government for environmental flows.

Government water buy back should be concentrated in areas of least viability and incentives given to close down unproductive farming districts.

Farmers under duress due to drought and financial hardship become willing sellers and a government taking advantage of this fact is despicable indeed.

There needs to be tighter regulation on ownership of water trading out of its region by investors and foreign ownership.

There needs to be financial Incentives to individuals and groups undertaking water saving initiatives on farm and for environment.

Research into innovative infrastructure and practices to manage environmental and irrigation assets which deliver environmental flows with the least amount of water thus minimising the need for the buyback scheme.

Summary

In acknowledging the Murray Darling Basin plays a key factor in Australia's ecological health, containing some of the country's most diverse and rich natural environments.

We strongly urge the Federal Government to adopt a balanced approach to the development of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

In setting the proposed SDL's for the Murray Darling Basin Plan we ask that the same consideration being given to the environment is applied to the social and economic impacts of the two million people who make up the regional and rural communities of the Murray Darling Basin.

It is imperative that the appropriate research into the social and economic impacts on our regional and rural communities be undertaken immediately.

We 'say no' to cuts to water allocations without this critical information.

That water savings already achieved through the Northern Victorian Irrigation Renewal Project Modernisation infrastructure program be recognised as contributing to improved environmental flows and part of the calculation of SDL'S

To initiate an investigation into the ecological benefits now evident from the recent floods and how these benefits will apply to the MDBP.

Water buyback schemes don't disadvantage the remaining farmers and communities.

I would like to thank the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia for providing this opportunity to make a submission on the socio-economic impact of the proposed Murray Darling Basin Authority's Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan on regional communities.