



Inquiry into the Impact of the Murray Darling Basin Plan

Split Rock Water Users Association Response

Dear Sir,

In your committee's inquiry into the socio/economic impact of water reforms, our group seeks to highlight concerns of so-called 'small irrigators'.

The Split Rock Water Users Association comprises the 80 water license holders between Split Rock and Keepit dams, centred on the N.S.W. town of Manilla.

In this area each licence generally represents a family holding.

Manilla as a town is surrounded by small-scale irrigation on the Manilla, Namoi, and Peel Rivers. Because of this, and the perception that the Namoi catchment is all about broad-acre cotton irrigation, we would like to offer ourselves as a headwaters town case study of the socio/economic impacts your committee is investigating.

Split rock Water Users are willing to host your committee members, to open our farms and our books, and to explain these impacts first hand. This would hopefully include a public meeting at which Manilla town businesses could participate.

Some of our concerns are:

The MDBA guide estimated the worth of each irrigation farm to the nearest town of Manilla size at 4700 dollars a year. Our members can show the real figure is closer to 20000 dollars a year.

The MDBA guide was unaware that dairy farms in the Upper Namoi exist, or that they supply 30-million litres of milk annually to the Sydney market.

The MDBA guide perhaps rightly expects fodder hay production to suffer most of all irrigated activities. Down by 42-percent under its 3000 gegalitre SDL cut scenario. Headwaters irrigators are predominantly fodder producers. The MDBA has taken its travelling road show to explain the guide plan to Narrabri and Moree, but not to the farmers and townspeople who it expects to be worst hit.

Other issues we seek to raise are:

Water efficiency. Our members do not employ flood irrigation. We employ underground mains to piped spray and sub-surface irrigation. The easy efficiency gains offered by moving to these systems are therefore not available to us. We cannot find efficiencies to counteract allocation cutbacks.

Split Rock Water Users have small licence entitlements. 10-thousand megalitres between 80-families (just enough water to sustain two or three big cotton operations) If socio/economic impact equates to human impact then the effect of cutting small licences is greater.

Fodder hay production may not seem of vital importance to urban dwellers, but is essential to the livestock industries. It allows farmers to maintain core-breeding numbers during the worst of droughts, allowing rural areas further afield to recover numbers quicker.

Also of concern to our group is a lack of clarity in the MDBA guide regarding the application of SDL cuts in each valley. We see a risk that state water resource plans will favour more powerful water lobbyists. In particular whether general security water entitlements will suffer greater cuts than need be as a result of water lobbies desperate to preserve supplementary water entitlements.

As the Split Rock Water Users Association, and a group representative of other headwaters irrigators, we ask if we can elaborate on these and other issues of a sub-catchment nature to try to find positive outcomes in this water reform process.

David Gee

President  
Split Rock Water Users Association