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16th December, 2010
The Standing Committee on Regional Australia

Dear Sir/Madam

Thought for Food

Now the dust (or rather, mud) has settled in the Murray-Darling Basin, what can be seen is an unprecedented opportunity to reshape and reform irrigated agricultural industries and practices in the basin.

It must be understood that for irrigated communities to survive, there needs to be a healthy river system if there is to be water for irrigation. The current river system is not healthy and needs rehabilitation. Environmental flows are imperative to restore the damage done by excessive water use that has continued unchecked.

One good rainfall, or leaving the environment to mend itself, is not good enough.

As with severely dehydrated athletes, one drink alone will not repair the damage done by excessive losses of fluids. Just like an athlete, our rivers need a constant infusion of liquids to restore chemical and fluid imbalances.

Reduced water allocations are an absolute must for the river systems to rehabilitate.

The main point of the Murray-Darling Basin guide has been lost in the mass of emotive energy witnessed after the release of the M-D Basin Guide. This document is a guide only- a starting point for discussion.

Another point is that this mass of energy can be galvanised by agricultural and community leaders to lead and create reform while they are empowered to do so.

These agricultural leaders will be the irrigators who have adopted water-saving technologies, the irrigators who respect the soil and climate environment they work within and the irrigators who embrace whole farm systems and farming within landscapes.

Farmers and irrigators who don't meet these challenges need exit strategies to move out.

Now is the time to revolutionise the food chain from farm gate to plate.

Other strategies include new ways of sharefarming and leasing, or creating co-operative farming. Federal and state governments can create employment opportunities by investing in renewable energy industries and relocating industries from the cities.

More employment can be created by reinvigorating the rail network, which would help to reduce freight costs as well as removing heavy trucks from roads.

Federal and state governments need to reverse the trend of phasing out public agricultural research and plant breeding. Unpredictable and changing weather patterns will mean greater challenges for food production. Farmers will need good public agronomic information and access to many more plant varieties to take advantage of good conditions when they occur.

The consumer needs to be encouraged to support local and regional markets and co-operatives, to lessen the distances that foods travel unnecessarily.

Consumers also need to be encouraged to eat and utilise seasonal foods as they are produced, instead of following food fads that require fruit and vegetables be harvested unripened, transported long distances and stored to ensure instant availability.

Now is the time to rethink and restructure how food in the Murray-Darling Basin is to be produced whilst meeting the challenges of climate change and limited water resources.

Now is the time for *thought for food*.

Yours faithfully
Ros Prangnell
Greens Candidate-select