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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia

Inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia

Submission by Smartrivers Association Inc.

23 March 2011

Contact: Amanda Waterman
Smartrivers Assoc. Inc.

Smartrivers welcomes the opportunity to have input into the Inquiry into the impact of the Murray Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia, and would like to submit the following points.

1. Planning certainty for stakeholders (business, irrigation, local government) is restored
 - a. Development of a better and more balanced Basin Plan
 - b. The magnitude of the required changes in the Plan is supported by credible science. The Guide's science cannot be relied upon to provide definitive answers on the needs of the environment.
 - c. Finalisation of the plan and implementation date for all states aligned at 2019 which would allow time for implementation of programs to fully recover to SDLs
 - i. Concern is also raised in regard to the proposed methods of achieving SDL's in particular the early focus on water buy back as opposed to investing in water saving infrastructure. The importance of prioritising and commencing engineering solutions for water savings. The MDBA should take these savings into account when determining reductions in SDL's.
2. There are a range of options provided to assist individuals and communities to mitigate negative impacts of the final plan.
 - a. Need for coordination of buy-back and on farm infrastructure
 - b. Options for improved implementation of buy-back
 - i. What is a willing seller? The concept of "willing buyer – willing seller" with regards to the buy back of entitlements is ill defined. It is important that the market rate is paid for water, and that the price recognises the inherent infrastructure cost that has been invested to utilise that water.
 - ii. Value of a coordinated buy-back in Lower Balonne – achieving improved environmental water
 - iii. Quite a few of our members have been trying to participate in the water buy back scheme, however there has been quite a reluctance by the Murray Darling Authority to accept any tenders
 - iv. Communities are able to engage meaningfully and participate in the development of solutions that meet local needs.
 1. The Aboriginal population of the Basin Area is quite vulnerable to the socio-economic impacts of the proposed Basin Plan reforms. These concerns are particularly relevant for communities in the Northern Basin (of which Balonne is a prime example) which are remote, highly reliant on irrigated agriculture, already include a large proportion of Indigenous residents and have small populations.

3. Monetary assistance to Smartrivers from the Federal Government through the MDBA, to continue to fund ecological monitoring studies in the Lower Balonne. This would confirm the Government's commitment to the ongoing health of the Murray Darling Basin.
4. End of valley flows in the Lower Balonne are affected greatly by inaccurate gauging of flood data by Government Departments. Volumes should be measured in their entirety across the Lower Balonne floodplains, but this certainly wasn't the case in the March 2010 flood and was definitely far from conclusive.
5. Smartrivers have been committed to the to the Water Resource Planning process with our involvement in the development of the Condamine Balonne R.O.P., and as part of this, have agreed in the hand-back of 5% of our allocation which is to help the environmental assets nominated on our section of the Balonne river.