

# The Rotary Club of Yenda

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**President: Bob Allen**

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To The Committee Secretary,  
The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia.

**The foreseen impact of the Proposed Guide to Draft Murray Darling Basin Plan on the township of Yenda**

**Yenda** is a township in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area(MIA) situated twenty kilometres North East of Griffith. It has a population of about 1,200 people. Yenda could be considered a dormitory suburb of Griffith however in its own right it is a vibrant community and a service town for both irrigation and dry area farms. It is the location of the largest winery(Casella) in Australia, a second large winery(De Bortoli),a medium sized engineering establishment(Suman), three small wineries, a large agricultural supply and service cooperative(Yenda Producers), a farm fuel and agribusiness, two K-6 schools(parish and state) and several local businesses including a supermarket, post office, hotel, registered club, restaurant, hairdresser, road transport and grain and rice handling facilities.

The agricultural pursuits in the wider district, including dry area and irrigation farms, produce cereal grains(wheat,barley,oats), rice, faba beans, lupins, canola, fodder(hay), grapes for both wine and table, citrus, prunes, onions, garlic, carrots, tomatoes(canning and pulp), pumpkins, melons and capsicums. There is a livestock industry which produces prime lamb, beef, pork, mutton, wool to mention the principal income earners.

It is foreseen that a **reduction in the water available for irrigation** will have a deleterious effect on **production coming from irrigation farms** and a harmful impact on the **economic wellbeing of the people and social fabric** of Yenda and the several dry area communities in immediate proximity to Yenda and other irrigation towns in the MIA. These **dry area communities**(radius of 60 kilometres from an irrigation town) depend on the irrigation towns for employment for many of their citizens, as well irrigation towns provide a second income, in many cases, for many dry area farming families during difficult times. Any measure or event which **effects the prosperity of the people of any community** has been demonstrated to have a disrupting effect to the social harmony which binds a family and a community together. The disruption caused effects families and individuals in many ways including an increase in frequency youth and adult suicide and an increase in domestic violence and mental health problems that effect both children and adults.

Irrigation farmers throughout the Murray Darling Basin are **following best practice methods** in use of available water. Recent water availability has been much less than usual because of drought conditions and yet Yenda farmers have adapted to the conditions and remained viable. To impose a

**permanent reduction** on each farmer's water entitlement by over 30% such as would be the outcome from the proposals made in the recently released draft to the guide to the plan would result in a **loss of irrigation farm production** of between 30% and 50%. The economic impact of this scenario is too disastrous and depressing to contemplate for all MIA and surrounding dry area communities be they large, medium or small. Data from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE), a report by Dr. Judith Stubbs and an Access Economics report estimate that 7,600 jobs would be lost and there would be a \$1.2 billion downturn in economic activity in the MIA.

**Where do the people who become unemployed go? What are the consequences for those remaining in the irrigation and other communities?**

A predicted migration of families and individuals from affected communities to who knows where would result in the reduction of services to those remaining. Health, Education, Local Government are three services that are bound to suffer. **Employment opportunities evaporate** as retailers downsize or close their doors.

The community of Yenda would become much smaller and more gentrified as families and individuals move away seeking employment because inevitable **farm production downturns** have meant reduction in production at wineries (the largest employers of permanent and casual staff). Small businesses become unviable, the reduction in school aged children force the possible closing of the parish school. Those remaining would face an uncertain employment future with further demands on irrigation water being just around the corner (perhaps). A probable increase in the **numbers seeking/receiving unemployment benefits** would follow. Fresh and processed food production would fall meaning alternative sources for food and fibre would have to be found, a national problem.

**General Comment**

Since the introduction of irrigation and the establishing of the MIA almost 100 years ago eco-systems have been established because of the channelling of water. The reduction in water volume flowing in the irrigation channels would have a disastrous effect on the established habitats and threaten endangered species that exist in the channels and wetlands that irrigation has created.

**Open channels need to be replaced** by piped water to irrigation farms and wetlands in irrigation areas thus reducing evaporation and creating water savings and not at a cost to farmers. Halting water buy back and using funds dedicated for this purpose would help fund the cost, using future fund resources seems an ideal way to stump up the balance. The long term savings would ultimately outweigh initial costs.

While it is accepted that environmental needs must be satisfied with regard to water availability for wetlands and natural and created habitats throughout the Murray and Murrumbidgee River systems, the proposed Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) would probably create a situation of permanent minor flooding of low lying areas throughout both systems. This would cover productive dry area and irrigation holdings and threaten households within both systems. An engineering solution(s) needs to be considered so that SDLs can be effective. **Over the bank environmental flows** into wetlands and natural and created habitats, as seems to be the Murray Darling Basin Authority's solution, is an **extremely wasteful** use of a valuable and limited resource in times when water is not in plentiful supply.

Graeme Bamford,  
Hon Secretary Rotary Club of Yenda.