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NSW REGIONAL COMMUNITIES CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL

Submission

**Inquiry into the impact of the Murray Darling Basin
plan in Regional Australia**

January 2011

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RCCC Response - Inquiry into the Impact of the Murray Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia

Background

The Regional Communities Consultative Council (RCCC) is an independent, community advisory body to the Premier of New South Wales and the NSW Minister for Rural Affairs. The Council is comprised of an independent Chair and fourteen committee members drawn from regional NSW, representing a broad range of knowledge and sectors, including; Social Services, Farmers, Women’s, Young People, Ethnic Communities, Health, Aboriginal Communities, Religious, Trade Union, Local Government, Education, Environment, Business and Industry and Economic Development.

Members of the Council are:

| Member | Town | Sector/Interest area | Constituent Group |
|-------------------|--------------|------------------------|--|
| Lynda Summers | Table Top | Chair | Independent |
| Julia Imrie | Mudgee | Environmental | Nature Conservation Council |
| Ruth Shanks | Dubbo | Women | NSW Country Women’s Association |
| Iris White | Broulee | Aboriginal Communities | Minister for Aboriginal Affairs |
| Mick Madden | Orange | Union | Unions NSW |
| Vacant | | Business & Industry | NSW Regional Development Advisory Council |
| Sue West | Bathurst | Health | Area Health Advisory Councils |
| Vacant | | Social Services | Council of Social Services of NSW |
| John Ainsworth | Macksville | Farmers | NSW Farmers |
| Bernadette Wenner | Wee Waa | Youth | Minister for Youth |
| Fr Tim Cahill | Blayney | Religious Communities | NSW Ecumenical Council |
| Janet Hayes | Kempsey | Local Government | Local Government Association of NSW and LGSA |
| Lyll Wilkinson | West Wyalong | Education | Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW |
| Kevin Abey | Armidale | Economic Development | Economic Development Australia (NSW) |
| Diane Erika | Bonnells Bay | Ethnic Communities | Ethnic Communities Council of NSW & Community Relations Commission |



THE RCCC VALUE ADD

The value of the RCCC is in the broad representative perspective that the membership brings to the table within a collaborative and collegiate framework. In considering policy issues, Government and agencies find the RCCC a useful reference group and an invaluable 'sounding board' for feedback from a body independent of Government but representative of the main leadership sectors of regional New South Wales.

The RCCC, because of the diversity, backgrounds and interests of the individual members and their constituent groups, all issues, controversial or otherwise, can be considered in the context of a whole of regional NSW approach, independent of Government.

Context of this Report

The Council appreciates the opportunity to provide comment to the Inquiry on the impacts of the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia on behalf of smaller NSW basin communities.

The release of the Guide to the Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan in 2010 generated much interest and debate throughout NSW communities. The MDBA community information sessions held around NSW were well attended and also generated much discussion. RCCC members were in attendance at the sessions held at Narrabri, Dubbo, Forbes, Narrandera, Sydney and Albury.

Since the announcement of the Inquiry, RCCC members have undertaken consultations in the smaller communities identified as potentially affected under the proposed Guide to the Murray Darling Basin Plan. This was to ensure those community members unable or reluctant to attend the scheduled Inquiry committee hearings had an opportunity for their views to be heard.

This report is based on information gathered from the RCCC community consultations across the smaller basin communities in rural NSW.

Consultation Methodology

The methodology used by the RCCC includes the utilisation of their constituent groups who have members in many towns and villages and feedback from community members in the towns and villages visited. The RCCC also encouraged groups and individuals via print and electronic media coverage, to submit submissions to the Council.



Report Content

This paper represents and is limited to a synopsis of the views expressed by community members to RCCC members during this process. Contents include:

- RCCC overview
- A recital of the main themes expressed
- A summary of participants views from community consultations at Annexure A.

Overview

The RCCC consultations reveal communities for whom a decade of drought has tested resolve and resilience. The lack of water in the preceding decade has highlighted the value of water resources and all communities share common ground in acknowledging that 'something has to be done' about water over allocation and the environmental needs of the rivers. However, the drought has resulted in significant socio economic impacts. Services have declined, jobs have reduced and government services such as health and education have been withdrawn as populations' decrease, with families dislocated by drought moving to larger communities.

Despite this context of economic and social strain, the NSW Water authorities have, in concert with Catchment Management Authorities, engaged effectively and diligently with communities to develop water sharing plans to plan and prepare for change.

Had the Murray Darling Basin Authority pursued a more robust and legitimate community engagement strategy from the beginning, the Plan, outcomes and reception are likely to have been very different. The failure by the MDBA to adequately consult and explain prior to delivery of a complex document with inadequate granularity to explain what such proposals might mean for individual communities is at the heart of the hostile response. Given the history of close engagement by communities with State water authorities over the years and in the absence of preceding consultation by the MDBA, such a hostile response should have been predictable.

The result of the MDBA Guide for a plan exercise may have set back the process of water reform and potentially undone the progress to date auspiced by State authorities.



Basin communities members now express feelings of disillusionment, of being cut off from the water planning and decision making processes, and cut off from government. They express feelings of isolation, despondency and even despair for their future in rural NSW. Even if the vested interest of some antagonist stakeholders is set to one side it is evident that the guide to the Plan has not been effectively explained, and regardless of its worth or academic rigour, its credibility is questioned and ultimately undermined by the lack of real community engagement.

The effect of the release of the Guide has been immediate and apparently underestimated by the MDB Authority. Basin communities report that new and planned investment in some communities has stopped. Employers are predicting job and production losses. Some communities anecdotally report property values have decreased by 10%.

The guide has raised concerns at individual and micro level. One Hillston community member asked an RCCC member "What about me? I have just brought a house in Hillston; I have a wife and a baby, I just want to work and support my family." Such significant reform needs to be cognisant of individual impacts. If appropriately engaged, communities can effectively input into reform proposals, and can adapt to adverse change, if the rationale is clear and supportable.

The RCCC found that a lot of individuals are asking, "What about me?" and "What about this community?" It may not be practicable to expect reform proposals to address individual concerns, but effective engagement can help.

Communities are now fearful of job losses, an exodus of residents, devaluation of properties, and reduced services. Schools may lose teachers once families move away, Doctors will move away, businesses will close and a spiral of decline may begin.

Communities acknowledge the need for water reform. However they also value vibrant, sustainable rural communities and secure food production balanced with healthy rivers and environments. Governments and communities together need to produce a balanced plan for the Murray Darling Basin. The plan needs to take account of the social, economic and environmental aspects of the Murray Darling Basin communities. Where social and economic impacts are unavoidable plans and resources to support communities to adapt to a low water future and to diversify their economic base will be necessary. The current serendipity of high rainfall and wet catchments provides a window of opportunity to achieve these outcomes.



Locations Consulted

The RCCC consulted in Hillston, Coleambally, Darlington Point, Forbes, Dubbo, Narrandera, Leeton, Dubbo, Deniliquin, Lake Cargelligo, Finley, Tocumwal, Trangie, Nevertire, Warren, Narromine, Burren Junction, Wee Waa, Narrabri and Albury during December 2010 and January 2011.

Recurrent Themes

Recurrent themes emerged from each community visited. These are;

a) Consensus for a Murray Darling Basin Plan

RCCC members heard repeatedly that the Murray Darling Basin does need a plan. Community members know how important a healthy river system and environment is to ensure healthy communities. They acknowledge that over allocation cannot continue. The significant message from all communities is the sense that community needs will be ignored. Any plan or strategy needs to consider the economic, social and environmental outcomes for a community and provide support for change.

b) High anxiety levels

Local people in Hillston, Darlington Point, Coleambally and Leeton expressed the view that the current uncertainty is (quote) "killing people". The stress level in these communities is reported as high. Planned investment is cited as having stopped, or put on hold. Anecdotally it was reported that prescriptions for stress and depression medication has increased. Community members are looking for finalisation of the uncertainty.

c) Anticipated spiral of decline of communities

Community members expressed fears for their communities generated by the current Guide. They believe jobs will be lost in the irrigation industry and by irrigation dependent businesses. Workers and families moving away for work will create a flow on effect of less income in the community, shops will close down, schools may lose teachers due to reduced numbers, home and property values may reduce etc.

d) Previous water savings to be taken into consideration

Community members directly involved in the irrigation industry know that significant water savings and buybacks have already taken place within valleys over previous years. There is a need for the MDBA to clarify if these water efficiency savings and buybacks have been considered in the Plan.



e) Communities to be part of the planning process

Community members spoke well of the current NSW Water Sharing Plans which were produced with input from representatives of water users, business, government officers, aboriginal representatives, environmentalists and community in a partnership and collegiate manner. These plans have been in operation in some valleys for many years and communities affirmed the process of producing these plans, a process that communities would like to see replicated in the plan for the Murray Darling Basin.

f) Review of the Science

Some community members expressed their reservations about the science on which the MDBA has based the guide to the proposed Basin plan. The RCCC is aware the MDBA has advised of the variable confidence levels of the research and data used (Page 38, Guide to the Proposed Plan, Murray Darling Basin Authority).

Concerned community members expressed strong belief that the scientific base for the plan requires reassessment and possibly peer review.

g) Greater investment in water saving efficiencies

Communities share a general belief that more can be done to improve water efficiencies, reduce evaporation and losses from open channel transfer and to improve water storage capability. Community appreciates this will take financial investment from governments but believe this investment must occur.



Concluding Comment

The RCCC appreciates the opportunity to provide this report on behalf of the smaller Murray Darling basin communities in NSW. Basin communities support and acknowledge the goals of water reform. They have a strong connection and investment in their communities and hope there will be a future for them under the Murray Darling Basin Plan. I encourage the committee to review the attached feedback from people in small communities to assess community sentiment.

Communities recognise the need for change but fear the current planning process does not adequately consider the social and economic impacts of water reform. Where these impacts are unavoidable, Communities want to see a plan for the Basin that supports affected communities to adapt to change and achieves a sustainable balance of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of the Murray Darling Basin.

Yours Sincerely

Lynda Summers

Chair NSW Regional Communities Consultative Council



Attachment A

Community Consultations - Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia

During December 2010 and January 2011 RCCC members consulted in the following communities; Hillston, Coleambally, Darlington Point, Leeton, Dubbo, Forbes, Albury, Trangie, Nevertire, Warren, Narromine, Narrabri, Burren Junction, Wee Waa, Narrandera, Deniliquin, Finley, Lake Cargelligo and Tocumwal. Towns visited and issues and feedback from the consultations are below.

| Issues raised and information gathered | |
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| Southern Basin Communities | <p>Businesses Comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had been a part of the previous consultation process for the Lower Lachlan Water Sharing Plans of 2008. Under the plan allocations had been cut by 55%. Many irrigators had sold their river licences and were now totally reliant on bore water • Irrigators had been encouraged to turn to high yield products such as almonds. Producers believed they had already taken their water cuts and thought they had security. Almonds take 5 years to produce the first commercial crop so we need long term security. • Believes the science behind previous figures has changed. • Questions whether the Lachlan River runs into the Murray Darling. • How can decisions be made on short term data? • Employs 70 - 80 full time equivalent jobs and this is based on current water arrangements. Admit they are still working their way to more efficiency gains in the water use. It currently costs \$60:00 per ML to bring the water above ground using diesel. All plans for any future planting are now on hold. It is believed that there were plans to build a processing plant but this is now on hold. • Believes planned renovations for the motel in town have now been put on hold. • "The uncertainty at the moment is the killer". • "What is the value of a ML of water? What is the worth to the grower, to the tyre man, the RTA inspector, the fertiliser man, the insurance man?" They all benefit from every ML of water that is used to grow a crop. • We have had 10 years of no rain and now this. No-one wants to buy any of the businesses in town. • I wanted to put in improvements but that is now on hold. • Why can't we look at more water storage? • Where will the families go that are suddenly out of work? • "Why can't we build more water storage?" • Employs 5 full time staff, if the water is reduced there will be less demand for my business. • The \$9 billion dollars spent on this plan could provide the water storage needed. • Something has to be done but not at the expense of the people. • Had plans to become more energy efficient but that is now on hold. • Believes cuts do need to be sustainable. • Lots of bores were put down in the drought; this will force people to use them more. • There will be job losses due to production cuts. • Many small towns in this area are dependent on agriculture. • The area produces cherries, olives, lettuce, pumpkin, beetroot, almonds and potatoes - 2nd largest grower in the southern hemisphere, cotton, citrus, melons, grapes, corn, wheat, barley, mustard, sheep and cattle. The loss of jobs in agriculture will flow on to businesses and services as people move away. This would be the death of our town. • Concerned for the loss of jobs and people in the community. The flow on impact reduced numbers in the school etc. What will the farmer's do without |



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| | <p>water; their income is reduced so they spend less.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rice mill workers have left, the rice mill has been shut for 2 years and the town has lost those workers. There are vacant houses now. • The dynamics of the community is changing; there is now the very old and the very young. • There is anecdotal evidence there are more people on anti-depressant and anxiety medication so the sense of worry and anxiety is real • The people know there needs to be a Basin Plan but the current plan will destroy communities. There will be huge job losses in a small time. • Nature has given us a break with the rain so let's take advantage of the break for now. • The Water Act is skewed in favour of the environment. The science is incomplete; it needs to be peer reviewed. The Plan doesn't contain an environmental watering plan. Where in the document are the checks to see if the plan has been achieved? The figure of 800 job losses lacks credibility' • Slow the process down; take advantage of the nature's gift at present. • Revert back to the Water Sharing Plans, the River Murray Initiative and Water for Life. • There have been impacts in our town already, another employer has laid off its manager and her husband is a tradesman and they are looking to move. • We have people from all over the world to come and look at the irrigation system here yet no politician has ever come. People don't realise that of the 200 hectare farms, only 65 hectares is under rice. If the paddocks weren't under rice the farmer's would be growing something else and once the rice is harvested the farmer can grow another crop such as barley. • The people who own a single farm will be the hardest hit. • There was no consultation with community before the Guide was released. There is a lot of anger in the community. 130 jobs were lost at the rice mills due to low water allocations, many more if the water cuts go ahead. If water is cut by 40%, production cuts would be more like 50 - 60%. There will be a domino effect as people move away, less kids at school, less staff, less public sector services. • The town will die; it has been built for irrigation. • The water sellers are not willing sellers, they will be forced to sell because of the drought. • The plan is more about the environment than people. The loss of jobs, population drift away, loss of services. • I have put my shop on the market but have had no interest. I probably could have sold it if it was on the market before the plan released. There has been no investment in town due to the uncertainty. • I have only been in my business for 8 months. I opened in a drought and have 1 apprentice. Farmer's are my main business, if they don't spend, I don't have any business. They need to talk to the ordinary people. • I started the business in 2009 and am just making a living. May not be able to continue if the plan is implemented. People have already slowed down their spending. People will move looking for work, which leads to loss of services as the population decline. • Have just survived 9 years of drought. The town population is about 900 people, many are employed on farms, believe many will lose jobs if the plan is implemented in its present form, many will have to move away for work. • If population continues to decline, may not be able to continue this business • This plan will affect everyone. • I have a son who has just bought a house for \$200,000. He has \$80,000 of his own equity tied up in this house. What will happen to him if this plan goes ahead? • Our community doesn't need any more changes to occur. 26 jobs have already been lost in the red gum industry. • There was a local private Zoo that applied for enviro trust money for their business but they have missed out on funding. This would have been a great tourist activity and would have created 3 jobs immediately. • The city people have no idea what is happening out here. • This town will die; it was set up purely for irrigation. If there is less water, less people are needed to work in the industry, they will leave town looking for |
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| | <p>work, there will be less money in the community so it has a snow ball effect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is now a McDonalds here which is giving employment to young people. • There is a feedlot but not much more as most businesses here are associated with the water industry. The water users have invested heavily in the industry. There is approximately \$1 billion tied up in infrastructure. The Water Act needs to be re thought. Decisions have been made without local knowledge of the area. • This town is 100% dependent on agriculture. • The water buyback is not willing sellers, they are desperate sellers because of the drought. • Real estate values have fallen 10% following release of the plan. • The plan appears only to have considered the environment, not people. • The job losses are a serious concern. • Businesses will close and people move out. It will also make it hard to move as people will not be able to sell their homes for enough money to buy in a larger town. Services will be lost with a declining population. • Believes the town will adapt, for example it was all doom and gloom when the cannery closed and the town survived. Change is often a challenge. • There will be loss of jobs and services. 43% cut in water would be the same as a drought. • There has been no new investment in town because of the uncertainty and businesses are stagnating. <p>Nobody's happy with the proposed water reductions by MDBA - the townspeople & businesses, the farmers - cutting 100 megs back to 60 megs. 30 or 40 people from here went to a MBBA meeting but didn't get much out of it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water's pretty important here - we produce: cherries (300,000 trees), almonds, olives (there's an olive oil extraction plant, we export to Italy), cotton - there's a gin for 10 years, 5000 bales pa, potatoes (2 biggest producers in Southern Hemisphere), citrus, lettuce, pumpkins, beetroot, wheat, barley, corn, grapes (table & wine, cattle, sheep, melons, mustard. The effect on the town is simple; cut water = cut production = cut workforce. We can't survive on 60% of present allocation. There are 2900 in the Shire, dropping each year since the drought began. Business has dropped 10% for 10 years (since the drought). There was the 'promise' of water (from the Snowy Mountains Scheme, for MIA) -60 acres of rice at first, then 100, then 120, etc. Rice was deregulated in 1980s - a disaster! It was the big players, lots of \$\$\$, wanted all the water, just greed! Govt took over the water, they took all the water, there was none left for domestic use downstream. • Impact would be devastating! If you can't produce, you can't supply. I saw how it started - little irrigators, then bigger developers came, it all took off. Then cotton came, it was good. But the population dips in dry times. Whatever they do, it MUST BE SUSTAINABLE (both sides). • People's voices were not heard when they decided to cut off the Lachlan River at Condobolin last year, in the drought. We're fishermen: fish numbers rose, there were more cod (natural increase), yellow bellies (fingerlings were put in). The cotton? - It seemed to help, even if there were questions. I know the whole thing's emotional - but it MUST be sustainable! • I want to continue living and working here - our assets are here too, homes, businesses, we can't sell them if it all collapses; we'll have to pack up and go. • The local Disability Employment Service - employs 8 people plus disabled, all locals - where will the go if the town folds? • Our home was worth \$150,000 10 years ago - now maybe \$100,000, if we could sell elsewhere maybe it would be worth \$300,000 but we couldn't afford to buy elsewhere. • There's been talk of relocation, where would we go? What would it cost? And how could we afford it? Remember: this town was put here in 1966 specifically for irrigation - what about it now? e.g. -If they put in a road, or a dam, there was compensation - but now? If there's no water, the buildings, the businesses are valueless. Our assets plus the farms (e.g. 10 Megs water allocation.) will still be here - we can still farm - hah! Rice needs water. There was a rice mill here; it's now shut since the drought. That has meant a loss of 50-70 jobs gone. We used to do business with the mill, that custom is no longer here. • The water buy-back was not planned properly, and was at the wrong time as |
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| | <p>we are still paying for irrigation water, even if there is no water- it's not fair. People in the city don't realise that we still have to PAY for water, even if there is none.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This business started before 1986, with a bus to transport our kids to school. In 1986-87, we were looking for employment options. In 1988 we started in a house and provided meals to the workers at the chicken farm. 1989 we got Federal Funding and expanded lunches to the rice mill. In July 1990 we came to the shop here - we employed 8 people with disabilities plus 2 support staff. Because we merged with a group about 6 years ago and after 5 years we were just turning a profit (prior to that we made a loss). It was 7 days a week through the rice harvest - now nothing! The farmers have no money, so they don't spend. We were open 8 am till 5 pm; now 10-3 (to cut costs - wages, superannuation, insurance) etc. But we ARE open - the ladies with disabilities still have jobs! • Would devastate the town, there would be less production, job losses, less money to spend. People would move away to seek work, it's a catch 22, less people, less services, less people. • People would move away due to loss of employment, loss of services as population decreases. There is a lot of voluntary work, e.g. The Museum but its hard now to get volunteers, it will be even more so if the population decreases. As a lot of the tourist attractions are manned by volunteers, it would be harder to keep them opened for periods so would not have tourists stop for as long so less tourist dollars. • It would destroy this town people would move else where for employment, café could possible become unsustainable. There would be job losses as the town was dependant on agriculture, with less water there would be less production so smaller job market. People had hung on during the drought hoping for better seasons, but if water allocation cut there would be no prospect of employment. • We have a farm and started the craft shop to supplement our income during the drought and was doing reasonable well but fear business would fall if plan was implemented and business may be come unsustainable. • Manager stated there was a lot of stress in the community, not solely due to the MDBP but a combination of the drought, prospect of a good harvest downgraded by continuing wet weather and the MDBP. There had been a big increase in the use of anti depressants. It is believed the tension between parents has affected the children and marriages. • There is a lot of uncertainty in community as to the future prospect of the town. Real estate values had dropped due to this uncertainty. Employment in the agriculture sector would fall, population would drop as people moved else where to seek employment. Expected their business to fall by 30 to 40% if plan implemented as in the draft. Would be hard for people to move as house prices fall makes it difficult to buy elsewhere. • Seems to be much the same story in all the towns, falling employment opportunities, falling population, less services, businesses closing, falling real estate prices, high levels of stress within communities due to uncertain future. • It would destroy the town. • I am confused about the plan? The guide already has had impact - loss of confidence in the industries reliant on water - no investment due to uncertainty. • The misery of not knowing your businesses fate until 2012 will stop people investing or spending money on an industry that could die! • Only 800 jobs going to be lost? Ask the local business experts how many jobs are going to be lost? Ask how are our communities are going to survive the impact? • It is the length, - only 2 years to go when the plan will come into affect. • People will not have had a chance to get out of the financial hole they are in after 10 yrs of drought. The impact on kids seeing their parents agonising over their ability to continue with no financial help or chance of getting financing once the plan is accepted. What hope is there for any farming future when kids today will not go into any faming venture because they do not know what is going to happen to the industry in 2 years time? • You're running the risk with peoples' lives! |
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- There are 12 communities earmarked for serious disadvantage. Those who don't want to sell their water will be impacted, Council rates drop. The Irrigation schemes will not have enough revenue to maintain infrastructure, the loss of confidence in the industry and taxation issues in relation to infrastructure grants.
- I am a 3rd generation farmer and am now not sure there will be a 4th. Why are you implementing flawed plans? There has to be fair compensation for communities as well!
- The resource has been over committed and we are paying the price for that incompetence. Please put some truth into the debate. We're sick of being treated like idiots - Get rid of the words willing sellers!!!!!! There will only be desperate sellers!!!!!!
- We are disappointed that they keep saying they were consulting.

Community comments

- "What about me" I have just brought a house for \$160,000. I have a wife and a young child. What will I do if I am suddenly out of work? I won't be able to sell up because who will buy my house." "I don't understand the figures, I just want to work and look after my family".
- The job losses due to production cuts will impact everyone. If people have to move away for employment, the town will die. If the water is reduced, where will the people go? Who will have them? Without the dams the river would have been dry anyway.
- Years ago the paddle steamers used to be stranded for years.
- They need to just leave everything alone.
- A couple of years ago we could have sold the farm. Who will want to buy it now with reduced water? We have trouble getting casual workers, so I have to help with the crop. I have reached the stage where I just don't want to do it anymore. The farm was our superannuation, now what will we do?
- The uncertainty is affecting the children. One 9 year old was overheard to say, "Doesn't look like I'll get a farm when I grow up".
- I have seen photos of the river dry before the dams, it is a natural event. The people who know the rivers live on the river but their voices aren't being heard. The people who are making these decisions don't understand what it means to us who live in this area
- Our community will die!
- It will be devastating" if they cut the water - we're just hanging on...
- With the costs of power & water, unless you grow cotton, drugs or veggies, you can't make a go of it - you need a profitable crop. I've seen lots of changes: in the 1950s, wool was worth a pound a pound... it's the same now, except for inflation. Federal and state government grants have put money into the town, done up the main street, etc
- The loss of more families will reduce the teacher numbers; the flow effect across our community hits everyone.
- The issue got bigger, because many water allocations were 'sleeping' in the past, people thought if I'm not using mine, I'll sell it to one of the big players. They never thought that all the allocated water would be used at the same time.
- Water must be managed -the last drought proved it. Plus there's the question of what food is produced: for export or domestic use? But it all comes down to dollars. Local farms have already done so much to save water - but that's been ignored by politicians etc. And now the river's in flood - what about nature? I mean, in drought there are NO environmental flows without our interference. We're proud of our farms here - We're proud of our community - it's tight-knit, it fights for community members, for the township & the whole community.
- I'm a farmer's wife 45 km's out of town, if this town dies I'm 100kms out of town! "Frankly, no water, no farm!" - That's the local reality. And if there are no farms here, there's no business, no town. And there's the question of the kids' schooling. My kids go to the local School (K-12) - else they'd have to go 108 kms to the nearest town. I have children with special needs if the town is not here there's no other support - what else am I to do? I have financial responsibility for them - total!
- There is a need to look after small and not so small communities together as



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| | <p>their reliance on irrigation agriculture is critical to economic well being.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio economic argument should be extended to other countries; we are importing food from countries which treat their environment even worse. • We are already feeling the impact - people are backing out of house and land packages around our area because of the uncertainty. • It is not only farming families this is hurting our kids - kids need to have a future! You need to tell them there is an impact on community. • Farmers seem to be shouldering the burden, why not towns and cities accepting cuts. • After extended drought, it's not an issue of willing sellers, it is often desperate sellers where the water allocation is the only equity they have left, so it's not correct to say they are willing. |
| <p>Mid Basin communities</p> | <p>Business comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have great concerns for the town, businesses, farmers and the whole community if the plan goes ahead. • This has the potential to affect 40% of my business. It will mean other businesses will have to close. The other community members probably don't understand the severity. • I have no faith in the science they are using. The plan needs to be looked at. The only ones who will benefit from this plan are the graziers who graze on the marshes now. No-one else with benefit. • Government issued all the licences, what do they expect people to do. The government set the policy in the first place and now they think they can just change it. Australia needs farmers, we need farmers. Where do they want us all to go? If it goes ahead we may as well just shut down the main street • I do have an irrigation licence but have sold off most of it. It was costing approximately \$6,000 fixed charges every year. The drought has severely impacted on the region. Now this flood has been devastating for our community. • Everyone has been busy with the crops, then the rain and floods we have not had time to get our head around this. I know a lot of people wanted to have their say but their busy working while there still is work. What do we do, don't they know just how many people this is going to effect and most won't know what hit them it will just happen and they will not have jobs. • This town has seen some retirees move in from other places. Because of the mine in their area, they got a good price for their house and have brought here. One positive from the flood has meant locals can't get out to shop in larger towns and are spending locally. • The Basin Plan is huge for our town but the floods now have the potential to devastate the community. There are great concerns for the farmer's. Some farmer's will be isolated for several weeks. Great concern for the mental health of farmers, they will need support to get through this flood. Some farmer's had everything riding on this crop and it has now been lost. This town has been impacted on by the drought prior to this flood. • Farmer's have adapted to the drought and have changed from planting cotton to other grain. Farmer's thought this crop would lift them out of debt but this flood has been terrible and water cuts on top of this will end our town. • Everyone knows the drought would end at some stage but the water plan will have severe impacts on farms and communities ability to get over the drought. • This towns population has gone down already just with the drought, people quote a population drop of 500. • Irrigators are greatly concerned and there have been local meetings. • The fixed irrigation charges have been a big issue; some irrigators pay \$50,000 per year. Farmer's have adjusted to the lack of water, have gone into other crops, but now there are floods. A lot of farms have been impacted, crops are down. They don't know what can be saved. • What do they want us to do, import all our food from China. Do they want China to buy up all the land? The drought has impacted on the town and now this. • There have been several meetings already in the area and Councils have been successful in securing funding to evaluate the social and economic impacts on communities should water entitlements be reduced or removed. There will be workshops held as part of this project. |



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| | <p>Community comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am flat out making a living as it is, what will we do if this goes through. • If this plan goes ahead there will be a lot of unused infrastructure. What will happen to that? Businesses are just recovering from impact of drought and the flow on affects to community. • Regional development will be stopped. Economic and social impact will have a flow-on effect. The whole process needs to be slowed down. • The plan had no recognition of basin value - community impacts were ignored. • The socio-economic consequences of the proposal would see towns becoming welfare dependent. • How will towns be able to grow with this plan? Will this pit urban against rural for the use of the water? • The implementation of this scheme will drive some people to suicide! What are you doing about this? • It is causing much anxiety within the farming community. A decision needs to be made sooner rather than later. There needs to be more spent on piping. • This rain and flooding has impacted on crops. A lot of farmers have returned to scraping a living out of whatever they can. • Young people aren't interested in farming; there is more money to be made out of farming. • Irrigators have really been given a crutch for a long time. If you give someone a crutch you can't just take it away without replacing it with something. • What about the communities, what about the people who live here. • We need producers, Australia needs producers • The drought has greatly affected this area, then the plan and now the flood. • Employment is down in the area. I used to be a contractor to the cotton industry employing 200 people. There has been no employment for backpackers and itinerant workers who would come into town. • The roundup ready herbicide has also impacted; there is no longer the need for as many workers. Thought this year's crop would be a saviour to farmers and now it has all been devastated with the flood. • The drought plus now the floods has impacted greatly on the farmers and the community and now this. They thought they had the best crop ever. • The loss of irrigation water will impact in this area. The farmer's are greatly concerned. • The current floods have certainly impacted. Crops are down and everyone was banking on this crop to bring them out of the drought years. • Is there a problem with the environment considering how well it looks now? • No recognition of Basin value - community impacts ignored |
| <p>Northern Basin Communities</p> | <p>Business Comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses have already declined due to the long drought and now taking water from the farmers will be the last straw for many. It is not only farm dependent businesses it's everyone. • Many Aboriginal people in town use to have jobs cotton chipping but they have not had work for years. Now with new sprays and if water is taken out there will be no jobs at all. Were not going to leave so what can we do. • People have been hanging on thinking that there would be money flowing when the rain comes but with the floods and if there is no prospect of ever getting more crops in many will just close down. • There appears to be limited scope of quantity interception activities unless there is a meter on it. The plan seems to be targeting agriculture, what about the large extractive industries who don't appear to be considered? • Is it true if planned reductions occur, towns will be turned into ghost towns and land sold overseas? • Our business has been hit with the drought now this. We employ 2 local women who come off farm to get enough money to keep the farm going. What will they do if we go out of business not only do they loose their jobs but they will loose the farms. • The environment is where we live; it is part of the community. There used to be the "triple bottom line", then the word was "sustainable", now the word is "resilience". There has never been "people", how many farmers, businesses, children will be impacted, towns will not recover? |



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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns for the water quality with mining companies returning salt water into the waterways. • The town has already been left decimated by water cuts and the drought. • What about the kids and jobs in the future for them - can't close an industry down without replacing it. • Are the banks just going to come in and take all of the farms that have been hanging on through the drought now with no water allocation they are going to be worth nothing? People are just going to walk off farms in mass and who is going to look after the land? There will be a nice river but the land will get over run with weeds and feral animals and the towns will have everyone on the dole - how much is that going to cost the government? • The towns in this area have grown on irrigation what are they going to do. • All businesses in town rely on farming. The large clothing shop closed down and one small shop now caters for everyone - what will happen if they close where the older people will shop. Not everyone has a car to drive to the larger centres. • The flow on effect is not going to be fully known - it can often take years for each business to slowly close down. • No one is building new houses or expanding their business. Everyone is uncertain about what is going to happen. This hurts communities just as much as the decision - no one will be planning for anything. • If we have to truck everything in it's going to cost more and more for everything, we only have a few services left now - we will have nothing left. • No one is investing in the area - everything is on hold for 2 years. There were three businesses that were going to employ some young people but they are so unsure of what will happen they are not employing anyone and looking at having to put people off. What is it going to be like for them 2 years of not knowing if there is going to be any cropping? • In small towns everyone is dependent upon everyone else. Who is going to look after the only people left in the town? No one will be able to sell their house; no one will have a job. • When do we know what is going on? I will move my family and business if I can't plan for the future here. • Our towns has had the first work in years, this is the first crop we have had even though we lost a lot if it does not rain next year and no irrigation this town will die. • The 2007 Act is only about the environment, community has been legislated out of it. • With the proposed water buybacks, less infrastructures will be needed, we will be left dispossessed and who will want to buy? • Who will give a commitment to the valley to discuss the changes? • I am desperately concerned. Just because both sides agreed to the Act doesn't mean it is right. The objects of the Act are broad, but the guide is all about the environment. • The guide makes a judgement in the reduction of water, why isn't there an option to increase storage? • There has been a study looking at the social and economic effects of reduced water of 25% reduction, this gave job losses of 14,000 and a reduction of \$19.4 billion dollars in production. They only stated job losses of 800? • How will the government know when the requirements have been met? • There are token amounts of compensation that don't last. As far as I am concerned we are sustainable. We have taken 95% cuts in the state reforms, you are now asking for 22% of our last 5%. • How can we identify the impacts on communities when the results of the new studies will not be known until April next year? What confidence is there that you will take on board the issues? • Irrigators and farmers have already managed with good environmental outcomes. Will the plan consider environmental actions already taken? There is already water sharing plans and environment plans. • It will be an apocalyptic event if the plan is put in place? |
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- The threat to farm equipment business is real and imminent.

Community comments

- The welfare sector is going to be seriously impacted with more and more people needing their help. During the drought people left and now there is a skills shortage.
- People were feeling low due to drought, when it rained and everyone thought they were going to get out of debt and get jobs and now if they take the water there will be no hope.
- Depression is increasing in the area everyday more and more people say they feel like they can't cope.
- Its all nice to have a good river but with no work - what's the point
- The town has already been left decimated by water cuts and the drought now this.
- What chance do we have - no one cares.
- All the young people are going to leave - there will be nothing here for them. Were struggling for skills in this area now, what chance are we going to have to attract people to town if we have no services.
- What are the farmers going to do if they can't crop - who is going to grow the food. Where do people in the cities think they get their food from?
- This will hurt everyone. Our town will die.
- People just think that all irrigators are rich and cutting water will only impact on them - they forget the people in towns rely on the farms for jobs; most irrigators are small farmers and are hard working battlers, they employ people, spend money in the town.
- No one came and talked to us about what this will do to our town.
- I am just a worker, we haven't had a chance since the rain to look at what is going on but if there is no work here I will have to leave. I can't raise my kids in a town if I don't have work and if the town loosed businesses, services - were out of here.
- If we loose more people the school will loose teachers.
- Is it true if planned reductions occur, towns will be turned into ghost towns and land sold overseas?
- We have all been living beyond the limits of the environment, over allocation. The environment is where we live; it is part of the community. There used to be the "triple bottom line", then the word was "sustainable", now the word is "resilience". There has never been "people", how may farmers, businesses children will be impacted, which towns will not recover?
- People are unhappy, what about the threatened farmers?
- Is it going to make any difference what we say? They didn't ask us before they decided to cut the water and they will just do what they like. I've had enough to worry about with the drought. I won't leave this is my town but I feel for families with kids they are going to have to leave. But where is everyone going to go?