

Concerns regarding the Murray Darling Basin Plan – Rachel Strachan January 2011

An introduction to myself; we run a family farm supporting 3 families with small children on the Darling River below Pooncarie. Irrigation generates our main income source, producing citrus, wine grapes, hay and fat lambs. In 2001 the Darling went dry, this forced us to sink a low production irrigation bore to save our permanent plantings and we converted our overhead sprays to drip irrigation. We have dealt with floods in the past and are currently a part of flood management strategies needed now with the present circumstances. We have also watch the river cease flow on 3 occasions in the past 10 years. It must be noted that we have always had a great working relationship with out state water agencies as they value our localized experience, but find the MDBA almost a secret society and their plan has shown how out of touch they are within our area.

The math's on the Lower Darling Basin Plan is extremely unbalanced in the favor of the govt. List below are the current break down of diversions on the Lower Darling.

• Town Water	10,135	(this won't be cut due to essential requirements)
• Stock & Domestic	1,363	(Stock & Domestic also essential)
• High Security Irrigation	7,633	
• General Security	30,300	
• Total Irrigation Licenses on Lower Darling	37,933ML	
• Total diversions on LD	49,431ML	

MBDC are using 61GL as current annual diversions on the Lower Darling. (Not sure how they came to this number nor is anyone else in the NSW Water Dept, the above figure of 49,431ML is as near as we can get to it)

Total entitlements that the govt is aiming to buy back 26% (16,000ML) - 35% (21,000)

MDBA figures are very misleading as to what will really happen to irrigation entitlements especially on the Lower darling as we are a very under developed section of the Murray Darling Basin.

If only irrigation water is what the govt aim to buy back that will result in Irrigation water cuts of

@16,000 ML reduction = 42% reduction in irrigation

@21,000ML reduction = 55% reduction in irrigation

Figures from the NSW Dept of Water show from 1922 – 2005 average inflows in Menindee Lakes were 2,060GL per year. Irrigation on the Lower Darling would therefore represent 1.8% of these flows. The remaining water is transferred to use as allocations in NSW, Vic & SA, positioning these states with water security that would otherwise not be available due to delivery strains via the Barmarah choke, large summer requirements of industry and environmental needs of icon sites throughout the Basin. Therefore of the 2060GL average, 2,000GL is predominately used to meet the needs of other river valleys for various industry and environmental uses. Yet we the Lower Darling Users are accused of causing our valley to be unhealthy, therefore MDBA suggest cutting 16-21GL off allocations here resulting in 16-21GL remaining to industry to put into production of produce.

To confound issues, most references like to give the impression that these events occur yearly or maybe 1 in 5 years. The reality on the Lower darling means that these events may occur 4 times in 20 years, but would generally be in consecutive years i.e. flooding 1973, 74, 75, 76, or drought 2001-2010. The Darling is much more variable than the Murray River. Modeling should be based on driest, wettest and median scenarios (statistically this is the "most common" not the mean or average).

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Using figures presented in the draft they claim that current annual environmental flows for the Lower Darling are currently 645,000ML & 1,021,000ML outflows downstream. This equates to irrigation using only 2.2%. Surely these MDBA figures show the environment requirements as being fully covered. It would be nice to see some transparency about what the actual environmental objectives are that they are trying to achieve for the Lower Darling.

There is no mention of TLM in the plan. TLM has purchased 250,000ML license of supplementary water, plus an introduced 'calculated savings' license of 47,800ML general security license. Add these figures up to a total of 297,800ML, which in percentage terms equates to TLM – 84% (297GL) Lower Darling Users – 14% (49GL). There had been previous govt talk of 1/3 for the river, 1/3 for the environment and 1/3 for industry; here on the Lower Darling the environment has more than achieved this required outcome.

MDBA claim that the Lower Darling is one of the unhealthiest parts of the Murray Darling Basin. And that Current Diversion Limits have created a poor end-of-system flow of 43%. They however introduced a new license of 47,800ML on the 14 April 2009, increasing general security licenses on the Lower Darling by 157%. To add insult to current users, this new license has no reference in the MDBA plan. There are also future plans in the pipeline to create another 250,000ML License as a result of the government's Menindee Lakes MOU, if end-of-system flows so poor why you would introduce another license produced by modeling that only takes averages into account not actual reality of how variable the lower darling actually is.

The MOU that recommends the decommissioning of Lakes Menindee and Cawndilla will only exacerbate problems in drier times and will only make it harder to access water for all involved. To preserve water in the top 2 lakes major work needs to be conducted on the Menindee regulator to allow it to run 9,000ML per day (current physical restraints approx 2500ML/day surcharged). Similar constraints also exist on the Cawndilla regulator and outlet channel. There needs to be better access to dead storage in both these lakes; this is critically needed. De-silting and improved channels would be of the most benefit to improve dead storage access.

Disappointingly in the Basin Plan there is no mention of the word barrage, yet the whole plan seems to be about improving the mouth of the Murray. Issues need to be addressed about how these structures effect the mouth and when there is going to be action on returning the drains at Kinston SE back into the Coorong. You can make over the top end as much as you like, but the bottom issues at the mouth are of much more importance requiring urgent action or we shall be here arguing the same point in decades to come.

In conclusion Lower Darling irrigators use a minimal % of water compared with current environmental flows and outflows of the Menindee Lakes. Greater access to dead water storage is urgently needed within the lake system. Actions are needed at Kinston SE and the barrages as without these issues being amended the Coorong will continue to deteriorate and blame will continue to be thrown at upstream users.

Thank you for your time, kind regards

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