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The Hon Tony Windsor
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

MURRAY DARLING BASIN PLAN

I strongly refer to your vow after the recent election to place regional Australia first. As an irrigator, I am to be decimated by the proposed cuts to the Murrumbidgee Valley. However, I am just as fearful of the certain destruction of communities such as Griffith, Leeton, Hay and Hillston. People who do not live in our region do not appear to have any idea of the importance of irrigation and flow-on industries.

Almost all businesses in these towns are water-related, such as earthwork operators, drip irrigation companies, machinery outlets, agronomists, water delivery corporations, fertiliser & chemical retailers etc. The rest of the businesses and townspeople provide services, such as supermarkets, cafes, post offices, real estate agents, schoolteachers, hairdressers, doctors, dentists, lawyers and so on.

Our two sons are farming with my husband and myself, and have recently purchased homes in Griffith, taking advantage of the First Home Owners Scheme. One is married, his wife is pregnant with their first baby, and the other son is engaged to be married. They are both paying mortgages on their homes. These drastic cuts will see the mass exodus of people from our regions because there will be no jobs. Therefore, our local economy will grind to a halt; the value of real estate will fall dramatically, perhaps to less than the amount borrowed from the bank. And our sons (and the rest of the town) are left with mortgages greater than the value of their homes.

I wonder how any decent Australian can ignore the importance of jobs? I implore both the Government and yourself to give social and economic impacts just as much importance as the environment. We need to look at other ways to implement water savings initiatives, such as storm water harvesting and dams. We also need to focus on new technologies rather than just water buybacks.

We pride ourselves on being amongst the best farmers in the world, proudly producing food and fibre for consumption by our fellow human beings. Importing inferior food (watered with raw sewerage) from countries such as China will not be an acceptable substitute.

I beg you, as representing regional Australia, to consider the following:

- We wonder where we are to go, if our farms are rendered worthless.
- Do politicians and conservationists really want the entire population to live on the coastal fringes?
- In the face of the biggest water management change in Australia's history, are you and the Government you placed in power, happy to allow regional people to be the only ones to pay for our international Ramsar treaties?

- Do you really want the Government you selected to be responsible for a huge upsurge in mental depression and breakdowns? At the Griffith meeting with the Authority, the mental health professionals warned of dire implications for suicide and depression, inflamed by the release of the Guide.
- If there are no willing sellers, will you and the Government you selected, then force these cuts upon Murrumbidgee irrigators? There may be some willing sellers, but these will be "desperate" sellers, pushed by their bank to reduce debt.

I ask you and your parliamentary enquiry committee to inform the Federal Government that the Guide and proposed Basin Plan is unconscionable, that you refuse to allow a Plan to be implemented that will destroy people's lives, that you have respect and consideration for your fellow human beings, and that you will recommend that social and economic impacts are given equal weighting in the Basin Plan.

The Murray Darling Basin Authority and the Federal Government are playing with people lives and livelihoods. We have families we love; we all have debt, and have droughts, floods and locusts to contend with. We can deal with what Mother Nature deals us but we do not deserve to be treated with contempt by conservationists and academics who do not live in our region.

The people of regional Australia **demand** that the Water Act be revisited, that we **MUST** have a reconsideration of the Water Act included in the Terms of Reference for the parliamentary enquiry.

Mr Windsor, you have the power to help us, please don't let us down.

Yours sincerely

Cheryl Stott