

**Submission - Inquiry into the Murray-Darling Basin Plan****Mary J. Chandler**

I would like to thank Tony Windsor for allowing me to forward a late submission to the above inquiry. Due to the lateness of this submission, it will be very short with many attachments.

As a conservationist, it is clear that a balance of needs must be fully considered before a Draft Plan is released. This must address the needs of the environment, irrigators, towns, industry and mines (not necessarily in that order). I raise the question about the rigor of the Authority's knowledge with regard to the direct impacts, both long and short term, of the implementation of the proposed Cap on communities in the Basin. Like many others I was extremely concerned when an article appeared in the local paper stating that the two places to be severely affected by the Plan would be Mildura, in Victoria, and Griffiths in New South Wales. Over the next four year Mildura would lose at least 8000 people

The Mildura Development Corporation in 2009 produced a report "Mildura Region Economic Profile – An analysis of the people, economy and industries of the Mildura region. At that time the population of the Mildura region was 60,281 and growing. It is expected to reach 63,000 by 2026.

The report lists the Top 10 Things You Must Know About the Mildura Region as follows:

1. The Mildura region economy generates \$2,788 billion in Gross Regional Product (GRP) per annum and is diversified across agriculture/horticulture, advanced manufacturing, logistics and services.
2. Solar Systems is building the largest solar photovoltaic power station in the world (154 megawatt) in the Mildura region worth \$420 million.
3. The Murray Darling and Swan Hill region produces 15% of Australia's red wine grape crush and 25% of Australia's white wine grape crush.
4. The Mildura region offers excellent education and training and research and development facilities.
5. The region produces a significant amount of Australia's fruit, vegetables and nuts, including 98% of all dried fruit, 74% of table grapes and 24% of all citrus.
6. Mildura Airport is the largest and busiest regional airport in Victoria catering for 188,708 passengers per year and offering 70 flights per week.
7. A high quality of life and a low cost of living makes the Mildura region an attractive location to recruit and retain employees.
8. Suitable land and infrastructure exists to provide for future industrial, residential and commercial development.
9. The Mildura region offers cost savings to businesses through low cost of living, affordable land and great infrastructure.

10. Over 300 festivals and events are held within the Mildura region each year.

The report lists the top 5 key employment sectors in the Mildura Region. They are:

1. Retail trade (3,975 employees, 16.2% of total employment);
2. Agriculture, forestry and fishing (3,718 employees, 15.1 of total employment);
3. Manufacturing (2,651 employees, 10.8% of total employment);
4. Health & community services (2,453 employees, 10% of total employment); and
5. Education (1,865 employees, 7.6% of total employment).

Mildura has always been a major agricultural and horticultural centre and as seen above, those living in the area rely heavily on these industries for employment. Horticulture includes wine grapes, table grapes, dried fruit, citrus, vegetables, avocados, nuts, olives and olive oil to name a few. And agriculture includes dry land farming, sheep and cattle, and honey. These industries have diversified and developed into manufacturing including food and beverage employing around 1,587 workers in the wine industry (40 wineries ranging from boutique to large scale wineries), fruit and vegetable processing and dried fruits.

Closely connected to Mildura's horticultural and agricultural industries is Mildura's machinery and equipment manufacturing sector. At Colignan, the Australian Tartaric Products Pty.Ltd. is Australia's largest manufacturer of natural Tartaric Acid. It processes grape marc, grape lees, centrifuge desludge by-products created from the wine-making process. It also supplies Citric Acid, Rochelle sale, Ammonium Tartrate, Metatartaric Acid and Potassium Tartrate.

If the Murray Darling Basin Plan is carried out in its current form then the future for Mildura is rather bleak. Already those in the horticulture industry feel as if they are in limbo - they are unsure of whether to continue on their properties, to buy water or to take the package the Government has offered and just walk off their land. Already about one third of the properties in Merbein have taken the package, and it is now waste land covered with weeds. There is little likelihood that it will ever be used again. The remaining blockies are faced with the prospect of being unable to receive water for irrigation from Lower Murray Water. It would not be cost effective to start up the pumps to run water to one or two blocks that have retained their grapes or citrus - LMW would continue to areas where all the growers have retained their permanent plantings but not where only one or two remain along a channel or pipeline. Water unbundling from land and water trading has caused problems, heartache and gradual death to the irrigation industry. It is so wrong that overseas people can buy up and own Australian water.

It is obvious that something has to be done to restore a healthy environment to the Murray Darling Basin. We have just experienced, and in Victoria, are still experiencing devastating floods that have hit 80 odd towns and communities and are now about to cause havoc to cities such as Swan Hill, and then on to Robinvale, Mildura and South Australia. The authorities have no idea just what the Victorian

flood waters combined with water that is travelling down from Queensland to the Murray, will do. The Murray Darling Basin has experienced very heavy rains, and surely these rains give us breathing space to look at the impacts the Murray-Darling Basin Plan will cause in Regional Australia.

It must not be pushed through without a thorough and exhaustive examination of the needs of irrigators and people living along the Murray. There has been previous over-allocation of water in the MDB and currently the over-allocation continues because of water trading- Every last drop of water is now used and will continue to be used whilst water trading is allowed to continue. This has turned water into a commodity, and as such, it is sold for profit, the higher the profit, the better. This really does not sit well with the new UN charter, which states that water is a common good. Whilst governments continue to encourage people to either use up every drop of water allocated to them or to sell it on so that it makes more money down the track, this means more money to Governments, and there will never be enough water for the environment.

There have already been both direct and indirect impacts on our community, which will be further exacerbated if the current Murray-Darling Basin Plan stands as it is. There must be a balance. Water cuts must be shared by all, including mining, industry, forestry, and urban dwellers as well as irrigators. Not only will Mildura lose thousands of people, but many of the other inter-related industries to irrigation will also fold. Tourism will falter. No-one is interested in visiting an area with hectares of weed-covered land.

Mildura is one of Australia's largest Food Bowls, and I do not believe that consideration has been given to the production of food. Where will Australia obtain its future source of food from? Many overseas countries do have insist on the strict controls Australia places on food production. And what will farmers do? Many of them come from families who have been on their land for several generations.

Mildura has turned to other industries, such as renewable energy. Even this resource is in doubt with the Prime Minister announcing that funding could be withdrawn from this resource. Several years ago it was planned to build the first solar tower in Australia at Buronga, but neither the State nor Federal Governments supported the plan so it was imported over to California, and Sunraysia and Australia lost out. There is a possibility this could occur again, a very disappointing scenario, particularly as the Mildura solar power plant would have been one of the largest and most efficient concentrated solar power plants in the world, planned to generate carbon free power. It has attracted State funding and is waiting to receive Federal funding before it can proceed.

So Sunraysia still needs its irrigation to survive. A solution is to improve infrastructure and help from Federal and State Governments would then assure that irrigation is fully efficient. Several of the pumping stations in Sunraysia are extremely old and in need of modernisation and if blockies were helped to change over from overhead sprays to drip irrigation run with solar power then a lot of water could be saved. The continued production of food, fruit, vegetables, citrus, nuts and olive oil is vital as Victoria expands its cities and its population grows.

The Victorian Water Act does nothing to ensure that environmental water and irrigators' water is protected. In fact, the powers of the Victorian Water Minister are immense and unquestionable as shown with the building of the North-South Pipeline and Desalination Plant in Gippsland against the people's wishes. The pipeline is now a wasteful white elephant, a prime example of government failure to adhere to the democratic process. The Victorian Water Act must be changed to give the environment, irrigators and towns in the MDB permanent rights under the law.

In fact, Water Laws of each State must reflect the unalienable rights of the people who live and work in the Basin as well as the environment's rights. I have quite a few doubts about the States adhering to and MDB Plan once it is finalised. And it will change when Governments change. The last Victoria Government took scarce notice of rural and regional requirements, including irrigators rights. In fact, when it began to build the North-south pipeline, it proceeded to push as many irrigators from northern Victoria as well as north-western Victoria out of business.

Sunraysia suffered when zero irrigation took pride of place for several years in a row during the drought years until August when it allowed a very small amount of water to be allocated. At the same time, the first year, all towns and cities along the Murray were not allowed to use any water on their gardens, and then after that, everyone, including older people, were forced to carry water in buckets to water their plants. This had a detrimental affect on communities, none more than Sunraysia, which suffers high temperatures in the summer, and has a very dry climate. The citrus industry struggled to survived because citrus trees need water during winter and spring to flower and set fruit. Town communities suffered severe depression. It was not pleasant to be faced with dead gardens and rising dust day after day and I believe, so long as water is used sparingly and carefully, people are entitled to grow some flowers in their gardens. It creates well being and the will to fight on, and Sunraysia has done a lot of fighting since its inception.

Today growers are fearful that they are sending good money after bad