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SUBMISSION - GUIDE TO THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN PLAN

Three Parts

Cost of the cuts.

Some headline points:-

A. The lower "lakes" will evaporate much more water than is used by the MIA in a year of full allocation (1,000gls).

Taking only 1,000gls (a third of the lowest demand of the Plan), eliminates all that production - over 100 B-doubles leave Griffith everyday plus the equivalent of another 30 or so in rail trucks. Another large number of trucks leave Leeton and Yanco - food for Australia and the world.

Millions of people throughout the world depend on Australian rice every day.

Multiply these figures for 3,000 Or 4,000 gls. Scientists began by telling us 500, 1,000 and 1500 gls. Now they say 3,000, 4,000 and 7,600 gls are needed!

My friends and relations in Sydney enjoy being supplied with the world's cheapest, cleanest and greenest food. It also has the least chemicals and has low food miles. They also like the high A\$ supported by our exports. Also, they don't want their population of the irrigation towns moving in their many thousands to further clog their city.

They are also uncomfortable about our almost total reliance on mining and China, to earn our foreign exchange. Mining booms come and go but farmers continue to sow their crops come what may.

Irrigation production is not affected by fire or flood and rarely by drought, so supply levels are constant.

Again replacing our production will require clearing more forests in such places as Brazil.

Our farmers are the world's best and use the least water per unit of food.

Some critics argue that irrigated grain production such as rice, doesn't return enough per megalitre of water. This is adding insult to injury when:-

- a) world grain prices are held down to half their true value by the agriculture subsidies paid to our competitors. Domestic consumers take advantage of this and pay farmers even less than these corrupted prices!
- b) regular wage and price rises enjoyed by these critics, are not matched by rises in farm gate prices. Our lowest paid workers can now earn the price of a day's food (at farm gate prices for grain and meat) in less than 30 seconds!

The critic is saying that food production (irrigated) does not pay and is a waste of resources while he pays us half price for it! Also, of course, he charges us the world's highest prices for the goods and services he supplies us!

Overseas interests are buying our land and water. They value food much more than we do!

When water becomes too scarce and expensive for the basic foods it will be used for such "essentials", as wine, almonds, walnuts, olives and trees.

B. Engineering solutions are not being considered.:-

- pumping over the river bank to our wetlands. This takes about 90% less water than over-bank flooding.
- do wetlands need to be watered constantly?

- More storage, a very obvious answer for what is becoming the world's most valued commodity. Even insects build storage for their needs!
- Removal of the barrages which keep the ocean out of the Murray's natural estuary.
- There must be a better solution for the Coorong than flooding the "lakes" with river water.

So far I have dealt with the horrendous cost of sending the water to the environment and I have asked that more acceptable solutions be considered.

C. Now we must discuss what benefits we will have from such a cost.

Ramsar agreements have been signed to provide wetlands for migratory birds from the northern hemisphere.

We should ask ourselves does this benefit match the cost?

We might also ask where these birds went during the drought - in fact, during all the droughts when the rivers dried up over millions of years?

By signing these agreements, we are arranging for these birds from Siberia to do many times more damage to our production than the most severe locust plague!

When Ramsar agreements were signed was it realised;

1. That the food bowl of Australia would be so drastically reduced in production?

2. That many thousands of people from the Basin would have to abandon their jobs, businesses and homes and move to Sydney or Melbourne and that towns such as Griffith, Deniliquin and Leeton would become ghost towns?

Tom and Jan Condon