

Craig Knowles
Chairman
Murray Darling Basin Authority



21 May, 2012

Re: Deliverability of Environmental Water in the Murray Valley

Dear Mr Knowles,

Further to our correspondence to you following the stakeholder meeting in Deniliquin in March, we are pleased to provide you with a more comprehensive report about the local third-party impacts of delivering environmental water in the NSW Murray valley.

You will recall at that meeting there was considerable discussion about the local constraints to delivery of water, which is one of the biggest issues facing this region. At the meeting you offered to have your technical staff revisit the issue of constraints if we could furnish you with further information.

To that end, the MGCC asked the Murray Catchment Management Authority (CMA) to undertake a high-level audit of identified third party impacts in our local region. A copy of their report is attached for your information. We would appreciate an opportunity to present this report to the MDBA Board and to discuss the issue of third party impacts. We would be happy to attend Canberra at your convenience to do so.

This community has been intensely involved in identifying and developing solutions to environmental issues in our local region, particularly in the Barmah-Millewa and Edward Wakool regions and are acutely aware of the system capacity and risks posed to private landholdings and environmental assets from high flows.

As we have mentioned, the reference in the MDBA hydrologic modelling to flows into the Barmah-Millewa forest of 40,000ML/day is a major cause for concern in this region. This CMA report identifies that flows above 20,000ML per day downstream of Yarrawonga has significant impacts on private landholdings within the Bullatale Trust area.

Further, there is no recognition in the modelling report or the “environmentally sustainable level of take” document of the risks of over watering key environmental assets such as the Barmah-Millewa forest.

The attached report also highlights the impact on public access roads and infrastructure at different locations throughout the region. For example, access to beaches in Tocumwal is denied at flows over 20,000ML/day downstream of Yarrawonga and main access roads to Cambell’s Island State Forest is cut when flows reach 24,000ML/day downstream of Torrumbarry Weir.

While we acknowledge that flows above those levels occur naturally, you and the Government have consistently said there is to be no negative third party impacts. While that is admirable rhetoric, the modelling does not seem to reflect this intention. The intention to piggy back environmental flows on existing naturally occurring small flood events could be the difference between people on a property being cut off for one week due to a natural event or up to three weeks if environmental water were to follow.

The MDBA has set a precedent to compensate farmers for access to easements to enable flows of up to 25,000ML/day in the Hume to Yarrawonga stretch of the Murray River. That implies an accepted liability that managed flow releases are compensable actions.

While we accept that the MDBA has adjusted its modelling to comply with most current operational constraints, except in the case of the Barmah Choke, this report clearly identifies many issues that are outside operational conditions, but must be considered before implementing the Basin Plan.

The worst thing that could happen is for the Government to have purchased more water than they can handle without third party impacts.

To this end, we still believe it would be beneficial if we could understand the proposed water flow regime. This would give the MDBA and us an opportunity to identify more clearly if any of the impacts that are identified in the CMA report are likely to occur.

We realise you are receiving this report well outside the submission period and apologise for the delay in getting it finalised and provided to you. We thank you for the offer to have your technical staff review this report in relation to the modelling of flows, particularly downstream of Yarrawonga weir and trust the report contains all the information you need.

We look forward to seeing the results of your analysis of this report and the submissions provided to the MDBA during the consultation phase. We hope to be able to meet with your Board at your earliest convenience to discuss this issue further.

Regards,

Bruce Simpson /
Chair, Murray Group of Concerned Communities