

**Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

Water Amendment Bill 2018

Submission by Bob Newman Adelaide SA – private individual with a strong interest in the health of the Murray-Darling Basin

This submission is to raise concerns over the Water Amendment Bill 2018. The Bill appears to be specifically aimed at circumventing the community consultation requirements that were a key element of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan when it was initiated in 2011 and subsequently adopted in 2012.

The Water Act 2007 sets out minimum requirements for consultation and it appears that the MDBA have stuck to those minimum requirements. A recent example was the SDL adjustment process. I understand that the MDBA had worked on this process, together with the States, for more than four years before a one month consultation period was initiated late last year.

That consultation was not well publicised and the MDBA rejected the inputs that were put forward. The amendment was tabled into parliament without change.

Subsequently the issue received considerable publicity, in particular due to the lack of transparency and the limitations of the scientific and economic analyses. A group of impartial but influential scientists presented a Scientists Declaration calling for a pause in the implementation of the Basin Plan and further impartial review.

The concern was supported by a public clamour and the Senate supported a disallowance motion. Subsequently, the Southern Basin SDL adjustment review was passed following a deal between the major parties. I understand that the deal would have provided for bipartisan support for the Northern Basin SDL adjustment review should it be resubmitted in accordance with the Act during the next few months.

However the Government, through the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, has now initiated this Water Amendment Bill 2018 which not only attempts to circumvent the disallowance decision but also provides the Minister with additional long term powers to direct the MDBA. It appears that the issue is already covered by existing legal processes.

My contacts in the water resource management community had already commented on the increasing politicisation of the MDBA and its supporting scientists, eg CSIRO. This current Bill appears not only to be unnecessary but is deliberately designed to subjugate the consultation process associated with good water resource management. The Federal Government took over State powers of water resource management in order to achieve better outcomes for the environment and avoid the States' over-allocation history. The Federal Government approach appears to be no better. Accordingly, I urge the Senate Committee to reflect on the inherent subterfuge associated with this Bill.

The Bill should be rejected on the basis of over-reach and being unnecessary.

Bob Newman 24/05/2018