

17th December 2010

SUBMISSION REGARDING PROPOSED MURRAY DARLING PLAN

Dear Sirs,

I am an accountant in public practice in Leeton, NSW which lies in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. I moved to Leeton with my wife and our young family in 1985 to join an established, albeit small, accounting practice. I have grown to love Leeton, its people and its community and now consider it home. My wife's parents' farm was resumed with the construction of the Blowering Dam at Tumut in the 1960s and it is an interesting coincidence that we now live and earn a living in an area that benefited from the dam's construction.

Our region, and indeed most of the eastern seaboard, has experienced a prolonged and severe drought over the past 10 or so years. Having the opportunity and privilege to work with local farming families and business people, I have seen first hand how the drought has detrimentally affected their returns/profits, not to mention their spirits. Luckily for us, we have a strong sense of community which has seen our town support one another during this difficult time and the Federal and State Government assistance in the form of interest subsidies and exceptional circumstances have in some instances been the difference between surviving the drought or having to exit farming.

I do not profess to know whether our local environment is suffering from an over allocation of water for irrigation purposes or not, and I acknowledge that a man induced warming climate will change weather patterns in the future. However, I am disappointed in a number of aspects relating to the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan and I list these below.

- The Murray-Darling Basin Authority's (MDBA) Draft Basin Plan aims to increase the Murray River's outflows by as much as 100 per cent as a way of keeping the river's mouth open. However it ignores the removal of the man made barrages which would guarantee that the mouth remains open, thus returning two artificial freshwater lakes back to a functioning estuary and save up to 1000 gegalitres (two Sydney Harbours) of evaporation each year. Existing irrigated farms could be maintained with new pipelines and the evaporation savings used to improve South Australia's water security. As a result of the barrages the Murray has now a smaller and dysfunctional estuary, the Coorong, and an abrupt change to an artificial and dysfunctional freshwater body being the lakes and the lower reaches of the river. Constant water levels in the lakes have also reduced habitat and wading bird numbers. The "River Murray Barrages and Environmental Flows" report published in 2000 by the Murray Darling Basin Commission provides a litany of environmental failures. Why has the plan ignored consideration of relocating the barrages?

- A recent admission by MDBA that the science and data it has used in the plan comes with only a medium level of confidence and that it has little evidence to be sure of successful outcomes from environmental watering. This provides little confidence to farmers, who stand to lose up to 43 per cent of their water that the measures will result in tangible benefits for the environment. Why wasn't more detailed scientific evidence collected over a longer period before presenting the draft plan?
- The process undertaken by the MDBA has been poor, considering the confusion created by differing interpretations of the Water Act 2007. According to a report of the Solicitor General to the Federal Minister Tony Burke, the MDBA incorrectly considered the environment only in the plan. The Solicitor General stated that under the Water Act, not only could the MDBA consider the economic and social aspects, but rather, it should have.
- The MDBA has largely ignored engineering solutions to provide more water to the environment. This is another glaring omission and one which should be explored fully. Increased water efficiency to reduce consumption could result in a win-win for both the environment and irrigators.

In summary I believe the MDBA has failed to deliver a balanced plan and is based on dubious or incomplete science. Further, it contains some glaring omissions which leaves our community disappointed and frustrated. Considering, what our farmers and local communities stand to lose, it is not surprising that this frustration has turned to anger.

I respectfully ask the issues contained in this submission be considered in future plan deliberations. Our community needs and deserves a plan that takes into account environmental, economic and community issues and offers a sustainable future, for our community and all Murray-Darling Basin Communities.

Yours faithfully

ANTHONY J. RODDY
CERTIFIED PRACTISING ACCOUNTANT