

**SUBMISSION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY
INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT AND USE OF COMMONWEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL WATER**

Submission from:

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The Murray Darlin Basin Plan is close to achieving its target recovery of 2,750 Gigalitres which will bring the amount of water available for the environment on average each year to approximately 21,850GL or 67% of total basin surface water inflows.

If an extra 450GL can be found and recovered without causing adverse socio-economic impacts then 68% of total surface water inflows will remain in the environment and in accounts held by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) and state environmental water holders to be used in the many and various environmental water programs.

As the “primary purpose of Commonwealth environmental water is to provide the environmental outcomes envisaged by the Basin Plan” (Mr David Papps January 2016 submission to Senate Select Committee Inquiry into MDB Plan) ,the CEWH in particular must be transparently accountable in their use of this large amount of water which is a very precious resource in a country which is the driest inhabited continent on earth.

Terms of Reference Point 3:

The role of the CEWH in monitoring and evaluating outcomes of the use of environmental water

The CEWH and MDBA continually publish reports informing the public that native fish are breeding well, bird numbers are increasing and river bank vegetation is improving, but not once have I seen any report or document that specifically documents the disbenefits or damage caused by environmental flows.

I refer to the loss of large numbers of mature red gums along the Goulburn River, increased bank slumping, increase in carp numbers and hypoxic blackwater events, the massive spread of the invasive Lippia weed in NSW causing a 60% reduction in productivity on floodplain properties.

The CEWH denies that environmental water flows cause blackwater events. Well, show us the evidence of that.

This inquiry must ask the CEWH’s office and the MDBA for evidence and documentation that they should have on environmental damage that has been caused by increased environmental flows.

Documentation should also be presented on the survival of the increased numbers in following years of various bird and native fish species. Breeding may well have increased, but is there evidence of survival of increased numbers?

We are constantly being told that it is too soon to evaluate this. If that is the case then no further water should be acquired or recovered until this is evaluated.

Terms of Reference Point 1:

Maximising the use of environmental water for the protection and restoration of environmental assets;

1. Attempting to “maximise the use of environmental water for the protection and restoration of environmental assets” with the implementation of Constraints Strategies is simply not technically feasible nor achievable.

The massive disturbance factor and sheer cost of “relaxed constraints” totally outweighs any benefits. The \$200 million allocated as mitigation costs for constraints strategies throughout the whole basin are entirely inadequate, with the revised cost in the Goulburn Catchment alone being \$140 million. Under the legislative requirement of no adverse socio-economic impacts the recovery and delivery of the 450GL upwater cannot be achieved.

Landowners of private property along the floodplains of the Upper Goulburn, Mid-Murray and Mid-Murrumbidgee are resolute in their determination not to negotiate flood easements.

2. The myriad of actual physical constraints in all the major river systems cannot be mitigated. These include the Molesworth Choke in the Upper Goulburn, the Barmah Choke in the Murray, the Tumut Choke near the Murrumbidgee system which all have river channel capacity constraints of 9,500GL or less.

The massive costs associated with building higher bridges, roads, levees, flooding thousands of hectares of private and public property and all to be paid for from the taxpayer’s pocket cannot be justified.

3. Maximising the use of environmental water by releasing large volumes of water from Eildon Weir in the Goulburn system on top of high tributary flows (piggy-backing), is fraught with danger for landowners in the upper catchments, particularly when the proposal is to commence releasing flows from Eildon Weir 6-7 days in advance of forecast rainfall and high tributary flows.

4. Since the initial use of environmental water by the CEWH, I don’t believe the total annual allocation has ever been used entirely. Before any further water is acquired for environmental use it must be ascertained just how much water can actually be delivered without causing adverse socio-economic impacts.

In the September 2016 floods it was clearly shown that in excess of 60,000ML/day over the South Australian border for 5 weeks, and peaking at 95,000ML/day, did nothing with regard to the objective of keeping the Murray Mouth open without the need for dredging as within 10 days the dredges recommenced work at the mouth.

This flow incidentally is the flood flow proposed by the MDBA that is required to ‘enhance the environmental objectives’. In light of this the end of system enhanced environmental objectives must be reviewed.