

Sir

I wish to support the Water Act 2007 as it stands.

I have lived in Coonabarabran in the Murray Darling Basin since 1976. Up until 2009 my husband and I owned and managed a commercial farm in the area. We ran up to 2000 sheep and 100 cattle as well as some cropping over the years. Ours is not a rich area but it is not poor either. We are fortunate that the Castlereagh is so erratic that irrigation is not a viable option in the area. Farmers continue to thrive in spite of this.

According to NSW State of the Environment Report, DECCW, 2009 "Most inland rivers are in poor ecosystem health and the condition of wetlands continues to decline. This is mainly due to drought, water extraction and altered flow regimes." We may have had excellent rain recently and drought is not a factor at the moment. This does not alter the facts of water over-extraction and altered flow regimes. Deterioration will continue to occur unless the Water Act 2007 is allowed to address these two facts. The seasons will always come and go and there will be "droughts and flooding rains" but unless we return water extraction to long-term sustainable levels the inland rivers will continue to be in poor ecosystem health.

The purchase of water for the environment will be of little value at the extremes of drought and flood. Environmental water in effect returns some of the smaller flood events to the river in more normal years. These have been stripped from the river by the presence of dams and river regulation and need to be returned. This helps address the alteration to flow regimes.

Irrigators are resilient, they will cope. They have had it their own way for too long and the end result has been the parlous state of many inland rivers. In future those with entrepreneurial skills who are committed to the social health of the Basin, can welcome other types of jobs to the Basin, especially in the area of sustainable energy generation (wind and solar) and similar new technologies if supported by good government policy.

The Water Act 2007 is correct to recognise the need to reduce water extraction to long-term sustainable levels as opposed to continuing at current unsustainable levels. Communities in the Basin will benefit from improved environmental health. The Water Act 2007 is not out of balance. It is right in addressing the need to return substantial quantities of water to the environment.

Irrigators and their representatives are well organised and financed. Those of us who disagree are in the majority but are not heard.

The cost of watering down the Water Act 2007 is too high a price to pay. Decisions should be based on good science, not politics.

Yours faithfully

Jane Judd