

23rd November 2010

Senate Murray Darling Basin Submission

Author Peter Oataway Hay, NSW

I would like to submit that irrigation water buy-backs already taken from the Murrumbidgee River near Hay, NSW and the commercial uncertainty around the town has already had a direct negative impact on my family and other families in Hay.

The Hay Public School where my wife Carol Oataway is Principal had declining student enrolment numbers which were in line with a significant drop in the Hay townships population in recent years after water-buybacks commenced in the Hay area. (Hay shire council has details of population decline during this period)

The consequence of this population and student enrolment decline at Hay Public School was that it caused the numbers to fall below the NSW Education Department threshold limit for public primary schools which determines if it is rated as a P3 or P4 school.

Hay public school went from being a P3 school to a P4 school in 2009, my wife Carols salary was cut from a Principal P3 salary to a Principal P4 salary at the start of 2010.

Carol was offered by the NSW Education department the opportunity to transfer to another P3 school in 2009 of which the nearest was in excess of 120km away....she declined for the following reasons

We own a house in Hay and since the water buy backs commenced a lot of properties are listed for sale in Hay by people wanting to leave

Our son goes to school here in Hay

Carol's elderly widowed mother lives on her own here in Hay

The ultimate insult to Carol after being railroaded into a demotion and pay cut from the NSW Education Department was receiving a letter later from the Director of Staffing of the NSW Education Department congratulating her on getting the position of category P4 Principal of the Hay Public School (her demoted position)

We like a lot of other people in the Hay township are now stuck here with our houses losing values and our income being reduced.

Other people here in Hay are stuck with their house price declining and their job disappearing, and others the family has separated as one of the partners has gone away to work elsewhere.

Hay Shires Chief Financial Officer Mr. Mark Dowling stated in our local newspaper "The Riverine Grazier" a few weeks ago that Hay township is quickly becoming a welfare

dominated population.

These are problems that water buy-backs around Hay have already caused !

Another problem the current uncertainty around the future of Hay I suggest these water buy-backs are affecting is the Hay Shires quest to get a General Practitioner to Hay as our current one Dr Ratnam is about to leave and join his family which has resettled in another community where his wife is working. Dr Ratnam is working out of the Hay Surgery for a limited number of days per week and Locums are covering the Hay Hospital in tandem with him.

Unfortunately this situation has led to a time lag for people requiring prescriptions of regular medications (blood-pressure, diabetes, etc) and the practice of our local pharmacy providing people with these prescription medications prior to receiving the prescription is currently occurring (done it myself) in fact the staff at the doctors surgery have advised me to ask for my prescription from the chemist shop prior to me receiving my prescription from the doctor, then fixing it up after I do.

I am not alone this is happening with many others who have regular prescriptions which due to the doctor shortage we are currently experiencing here at Hay are often finding their prescriptions run out prior to the doctor being available for an appointment.

With the Hay township suffering from a large abrupt decline in population mainly due to water-buybacks and uncertainty as to future MDBA future water buybacks from the Murrumbidgee River near Hay, attracting a new General Practitioner to come here to a town in decline will be very difficult.

I also ask what thoughts the MDBA has put into the future of the 4-500 children currently going to Primary and High School here in Hay ?

Do they have a future in Hay ? Will there be any jobs left for them in Hay for them ? Will Hay exist as a township after the MDBA water buy - backs occur ?

Or is this draft plan of the MDBA's pointing Hay towards a "Grapes of Wrath" type future where we must leave and re-settle elsewhere ?

I fear that the MDBA's current draft policy direction will ultimately end in my family leaving Hay, stuck with a real estate asset (house) of little value and a huge mortgage debt which will probably take until we reach superannuation age to re-pay.

I don't think we will be the only family in Hay currently in that situation which has been bought about mostly by government policy interference in our life.

And I don't think we are the only family in a town along any of the Murray Darling Basin Rivers and Waterways that is not concerned in a large crash in our houses market value.