

22 November 2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs & Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Fax: (02) 6277 5811

Dear Sir

RE: CONCERNS – MURRAY DARLING BASIN AUTHORITIES DRAFT PLAN

I am writing to lodge my concerns in relation to the Murray Darling Basin Authorities draft plan and the impact it would have on myself and others should the plan be approved.

I am currently employed as Office Manager of a Law Firm in Moree, North West New South Wales. Moree is located in the Gwydir river catchment area. The firm I work for has been operating for well over 115 years and currently employs full time, casual and part time staff in excess of 25 people. I have been employed for a period of 20 years. I am a single mother of 2 small children aged 7 years and 3 years. As I am solely responsible for the day to day care of my children seven days per week I am extremely worried about the effect that this draft proposal may have on my, and my family's future if this goes ahead.

All of my family were born in and around Moree and have resided locally for the majority of our life and understand the importance of how agriculture affects the cashflow of all business in the district. During times of drought for instance, cashflow from farming pursuits is extremely restricted and this has flow on effects to local businesses, regardless of what type of business it is. In recent years because of long running drought our town has suffered with the closure of many local businesses and will take time to recover long after the drought has ended.

The firm that I work for supports local charities, schools and sporting groups by making donations and providing legal services to local community groups free of charge from time to time. A large majority of our firm's work is directly related to irrigation and farming, and the proposed draft plan as it stands would have adverse affects to the extent that the firm would no longer prove viable in its current form and as a result all those employed could be without jobs.

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As an estimate, for every dollar that the irrigation industry brings to town, seven times this amount is spent by local community. The proposed plan would have drastic ramifications to local business houses with large loss of employment, which would have flow on effects to schools, health and other services, community events, housing and business values and loss of investment income.

If there are large volumes of jobs lost, how are people expected to sell properties that are worth significantly less let alone pay back mortgages and have enough funds available to be able to look for alternate employment in other areas of the state or interstate. If they are unable to find alternate employment locally they would have to relocate if they are lucky enough to find employment in other towns that haven't been affected by the plan proposed.

It is a great concern and fear of mine to have to uproot my young family to look for employment in other towns away from their extended family unit who live in Moree as I feel this would be extremely detrimental to them to lose this connection.

My mother is also elderly and is unable to travel any extended distance from her home. She relies on my assistance on a weekly basis, and if I was to relocate to another town centre she would be extremely isolated and would have to try and rely on other community services rather than rely on help from her family. This would be extremely worrying to her as well as many other elderly citizens would find that they are more isolated than ever before if the population was reduced and health centres services cut back more than what they currently are.

I feel that there will be almost no benefits to the environment in this district. The flows as currently stand are not fully used as is. There will also be flow on impacts to people in the city such as increased food prices because primary production will decrease. This is noticeable during times of drought already when the cost of food increases when production decreases. Standards of living will drastically decrease to many people in the community, especially those that are currently most vulnerable due to loss of employment locally and reduced populations.

The Gwydir Valley is different to river systems in the Murray Darling. We have unique terminal wetland system in which almost none of the environmental flows actually go into the rest of the Murray Darling Basin. Maps showing a direct flow from the Gwydir to the Barwon are incorrect. Other southern river systems make up the majority of flow for the Murray Darling.

There is a clear conflict between State and Federal Governments over the success of existing plans to balance water needs. Plans for the Gwydir have not had time to have effect. MDBA claims that the Gwydir's health is at risk under the plans are incorrect. If the MBDA has these basics wrong, what else is incorrect in their report?

An estimate of economic loss of 200-300 million dollars out of the local economy may be experienced, in addition to job loss' of up to 7.6% (1 in 13 people currently employed would lose their job potentially) which could not be replaced by eco tourism or mining unlike other towns, population loss of up to 9.6% (1 in 10 people leaving the district) and the high indigenous population of 19.4% means all the above problems will hurt the interests of Aboriginal people proportionately

more in Moree than elsewhere. Urban congestion and strain on existing resources will increase with the influx of workers from affected communities having to relocate to areas where employment is available. Government should be working to ensure that communities like Moree and district are able to continue to live and work here.

I thank you for your consideration of my concerns and comments above with respect to the proposed plan and trust that something positive for the people of Moree and district will come out of this with regards to this proposed plan not being passed.

Yours faithfully

Margot Marshall