



Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on
Rural Affairs and Transport
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600

P.O. Box 169
Moree, NSW 2400

Dear Sir/Madame,

As a fifth generation Moree resident I am deeply concerned by the proposal put out by the Murray Darling Basin Authority. The proposal recommends cuts in annual average water use in the Gwydir valley of between 27% and 37%. This will reduce our irrigated cropping area by 15,000 to 20,000 hectares per year. A 25% cut, as indicated in the Judith Stubbs and Associates Report, would conservatively result in 232 job losses. This would then lead to 649 people leaving town. Moree is a large community, but losses of this nature would be devastating and the impacts would be much more significant in the smaller communities of Boomi and Mungindi.

The objective of the Murray Darling Basin Proposal, as admitted in the Moree information secession was to satisfy environmental guidelines. Guidelines that only became part of the Water Act so that the Federal Government could constitutionally pass an act without State support. How can such a politically motivated piece of legislation be in anyone's best interests? Was it really initiated to assess the sustainability of the system, or rather to satisfy the green vote?

I have an agricultural degree and an M.B.A. majoring in agribusiness and marketing. I have been privileged to work in the Australian agricultural industry for over 20 years. It is one of the most innovative agricultural industries in the world. Our farmers are continuously looking for more efficient ways to achieve results. The Gwydir valley consistently produces some of the highest cotton yields in the world and does it by balancing inputs, including water, in the most efficient manner they can. They are conscious that they must be sustainable as they are indeed the custodians of large tracts of land; land that they want to hand onto their children and grand children.

Producers are well aware that water is a precious resource. They continuously investigate alternative approaches aimed at maximising the returns per mega litre. Almost every farm would measure where in the profile water is being extracted and how much. This ensures that they maximise their water use efficiency. The use of this technology also ensures that young professionals are employed in our communities.

As someone who grew up in Moree during the 1960's and 70's I was able to see firsthand the positive impact irrigation had on our community. Even as a teenager I saw the jobs both on farm and in associated industries. I also witnessed the buoyant sport and social events that came with employment and a prosperous economy. The town was alive with young professionals.

The current proposal has not considered the economic or social implications on communities such as Moree. It has failed to consider any of the impacts water cuts would have on medical and educational resourcing, on business or on the lives of the residents. There are two million people who live in the Murray Darling Basin and we deserve to be considered.

This valley has already lost water through buy backs. The removal of these licences has seen properties become rundown, businesses retrench staff or close. For every licence sold there will be at least one direct job lost. Each on farm job lost will impact on jobs across the community. Moree is a service centre where business has developed to support the needs of the intensive irrigation industry. These are not just businesses which can pack up and move somewhere else, many are irrigation specific. The people who work in each of these businesses provide employment for two to three additional people. Each of these people is a part of our society.

Our community is actively looking to diversify our economic base, but even if we are able to successfully initiate new business it is unlikely to replace the 232 jobs lost or bring back the 649 people to our community.

Is the supposed science in the Murray Darling Basin Proposal actually independent or accurate? Did it consider that droughts are a part of our environment? Did it recognise that the Darling River has stopped flowing plenty of times in the past and that it will probably stop flowing again in the future? When you have taken the water back, devastated our communities and the Darling River stops flowing next time - who are you going to hold accountable then? Why should the people in the Murray Darling Basin carry the environmental burden to satisfy the needs of the green vote?

Rural Australia is accustomed to dealing with climatic variability. During drought business is able to sustain employment because they know that weather is cyclic and that the drought will break and that industry will become buoyant again. Rural communities however are not resilient to misguided political intervention, which is essentially what the Murray Darling Basin Plan is.

If you truly want to save the Murray Darling Basin then you need to start again. The Water Act in its current form is flawed and should be discarded. There needs to be a rational, independent assessment which is not politically motivated. Any other approach shows a total disregard for the two million people of the Murray Darling Basin.

Kind regards

✓ Louise Gall

Principle of Ace Regional Marketing