

15 December 2010

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

Dear Sir / Madam

SUBMISSION: *Inquiry into the Management of the Murray–Darling Basin*

We are pleased to present this submission to the *Inquiry into the Management of the Murray–Darling Basin* on behalf of the Hume, Loddon Mallee and Grampian's Regional Development Australia (RDA) Committees.

Our submission has been developed in two parts. The first (this letter) is **a collective response from the three RDA Committees regarding our process**. To capture the specific place-based impacts we have also developed regional level responses for each RDA jurisdiction, which captures local issues. These will be forwarded to you under separate cover by each RDA.

The Hume, Loddon Mallee and Grampians regions are the heartland of Victoria's food production. Without doubt these regions' economic, social and environmental sustainability is dependent on the viability of the food industry and their capacity to secure a supply of water now and into the future.

This issue of water security and the need to establish sustainable water reserves are **clearly documented as a high priority action in each of the Regional Strategic Plans** (formed prior to the release of the MDBP). Collectively, we consider the impact of the Sustainable Diversion Limits to be the biggest issue facing our communities and as such water sustainability is the highest priority for action.

We acknowledge the need for sustainable water reserves however; to be truly sustainable, equal consideration must be given to economic and social factors. It is clear that each region and sub-region will be impacted differently. **The mechanism best suited to consider these changes are the Regional Strategic Plans**. These Plans will be integral to interpreting how the outcomes of the MDBP will impact on the aspirations and strategic directions developed by each of the regions.

We strongly support a process that utilises the advice of each RDA - not only at a macro level - but also at a regional level where real advice about possible models or options for localised implementation can be drawn out.

With regard to future engagement, we strongly support the development of a collaborative model, where the regions are in active dialogue with Government and information is shared widely to achieve the best possible outcomes for our communities.

We welcome the appointment of further consultants by the MDBA to undertake research on the social and economic impacts of the Guide to the Proposed Plan. The three Victorian **RDA's have already engaged with these consultants** in order to understand their proposed methodology and objectives. We aim to guide our communities into this consultation process to ensure all key stakeholder views are heard.

Of concern however, is the timing of the flow of critical information such as the social and economic research which is currently being undertaken and is not due to be completed until March 2011. It is imperative that sufficient time is allowed for information, analysis and stakeholder feedback to be obtained and shared so as to facilitate informed decision making. Our aim is to prevent duplication of work, so whilst we can provide preliminary feedback, **the timing of final RDA views will be linked to the timeline of work referred to above.**

It is vital that we work together to understand localised impacts of the proposed changes and develop practical solutions that strengthen the economies of the communities that we live and work in.

RDA's are well placed to access existing networks and local, state and federal governments in order to collate information and bring an understanding of the impacts on our Regional Strategic Plans to you. We will do this, and provide our results to Minister Crean through RDA channels in due course, in accordance with the considerations set out above.

Should the Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport wish to visit Victoria, **our RDA's would be pleased to facilitate a tour of the region.** Committee representatives would be able to view:

- examples of water management and food production efficiencies achieved;
- the adaptive capacity of primary producers in adapting to a changing climate;
- the major supply chain industries that have developed from a strong agricultural base; and
- the resilience and innovative nature of various communities and settlements.

We look forward to working with the Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport on this issue, which is of paramount importance to the sustainable development of our regions.

Yours sincerely

Hayley Cail
Chair, Hume RDA

Jenny Dawson
Chair, Loddon Mallee RDA

Jo Bourke
Chair, Grampians RDA

