

Attn: Sen. Doug Cameron

Dear Senator Doug

Murray Darling Basin

While the latest modelling of 3200GL of water to be returned to Murray Darling Basin rivers with constraints removed is an improvement on 2750GL, it is by no means the ultimate solution, for SA or the Basin itself. 3200GL falls a long way short of the 4000GL that science has indicated is the bare minimum volume of water that needs to be returned to restore the Basin to health.

Also, the latest idea for a plan has major defects and unknowns:-

1. The intention to extract an additional 1700GL from Basin groundwater, without undertaking any modelling or scientific analysis about the effects this will have on surface water (rivers, lakes, wetlands, floodplains).
2. An additional \$1.7billion for infrastructure designed to return more water to the environment. ... Where is this money coming from?
3. An extra \$265million to fund water recovery and industry regeneration projects in SA.
4. Yet another excessive extension in the deadline (2024) for restoring the Basin to health.

1. When CSG asked for 20GL of groundwater, Tony Burke required the appropriate modelling and analysis to be done. But for this proposed massive extraction (1700GL) of Basin groundwater, he has not imposed any requirements. ...Why? Where is his consistency?

Very little is known about groundwater's connections with surface water and the extent to which surface rivers and wetlands are sustained by this water, especially in dry times. Before any groundwater is extracted from beneath the Basin, appropriate modelling and scientific analysis needs to be done to determine its impact on surface water. If this impact is negative, and surface rivers end up being depleted, Basin SDLs will need to be reduced to compensate.

2. Providing \$1.7billion for works & measures (on-farm and regional infrastructure) is an inefficient way of returning water to the environment. It is five times cheaper to buy the water from irrigators (Australian Government Productivity Commission).

a. The money needed to be spent on infrastructure to create one additional job would create 3-5 jobs if it were spent on regional health and/or education projects. And such expenditure would have a much wider circle of benefit throughout regional communities, beyond irrigators. (Monash University study).

b. The benefit of monies spent on infrastructure tends to be concentrated on irrigators and the rest of the regional community misses out. Also, any water savings

generated tend to be localised and do not extend across the wider Basin. (Australian Government Productivity Commission)

c. Contrary to popular opinion, studies (Marsden Jacob & Assocs report ... Survey of Water Entitlement Sellers) have revealed that money received from selling water tends to stay within the regional community and is not transferred outside. As a result, it stimulates local economic activity.

Also, Basin product fell by only one half of one per cent during the 'noughties', (throughout the entire Millennium Drought), despite water losses of 70% - ABARE. This puts the lie to the baseless hysteria that came from Griffith. It also reveals that there are a significant number of irrigators who are doing excellent things to produce more with less.

d. Tony Burke has not revealed where this money is coming from. Nor has he provided any criteria as to how or where it will be spent.

3. Given the irrigation industry's past record, it would be ambitious, to say the least, to expect SA irrigators to save the required 37.5GL from infrastructure improvements alone. Again, Tony Burke does not say how this \$265million will be allocated or by whom.

4. Extending the deadline for the Basin Plan to 2024 is yet another appalling cop-out from the Gillard government. The Millennium drought should have reinforced in the minds of us all the urgency of fixing the long term problems that have confronted the MDB for the past fifty years. The Rudd/Gillard government has been in power since 2007, yet despite their constant blather, massive funding outlays, political obfuscations and backflips, none of these problems have yet been solved.

The chances of an extended El Nino drought over the next 14 years are real. Yet this government refuses to face up to its responsibilities and take the required action. Once again, the MDB, one of the country's most critical and valuable regions, has been sacrificed to naked political expediency.

There is now so much of taxpayer's money on the table to solve this problem, once and for all, that it is incumbent on Canberra to do this without further delay. The political 'realities' you talk about should not be allowed to interfere with the delivery of a solution that will guarantee the Basin long term health. Remember, the chief beneficiaries of this will be the irrigators themselves.

Yours Sincerely,

Alastair Wood
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