



15 December 2010

Dear Members of the House of Representatives,

I am writing at your invitation to raise concerns and offer solutions regarding the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

I applaud the brief which the Murray Darling Basin Authority had to consider with environmental outcomes as their base but acknowledge that social and economic matters also need to be addressed. I see their connection but I do not believe that was the intention of the Plan.

The 3 main solutions I consider to have the most chance of making significant changes to water management are briefly outlined below followed by some concerns I share with others in my community.

Firstly, as a method of addressing all three areas of discussion, I urge you to consider the concept of Permaculture as a proven response to water management issues. It satisfies the social and economic agendas as a result of good environmental planning and can be dissected scientifically for those needing such comfort.

I recommend you view a program called "Greening the Desert" by Geoff Lawton (of the Permaculture Research Institute in NSW – for further credentials google Geoff Lawton's Resume) that demonstrates how, with careful property design and water harvesting techniques, applying efficient use of available resources and diversifying from entrenched monoculture practices, we can grow crops in the desert! If you Google "Greening the Desert" you will find a YouTube video of the project and actual application of the theory with an update on the project 8 years down the track that proves the initiatives featured in the video to be credible and effective.

While I am not an "expert" in Permaculture design or theory, or an affiliate of any Permaculture organisation, I do apply its principles to developing a dry-land farm/ demonstration site near Black Hill in the Murray Mallee to promote alternative, sustainable farm practice. To this end I instigated the 'Barefoot Field Day' about a year ago with the support of the Mid Murray Local Action Planning group. The key speaker was a permaculture farmer who is actually converting his family property in Murrayville Victoria. He initially approached his father with his alternative ideas. His dad, sceptical at first, designated a small area for him to "play" with. So successful/viable was the experiment that the father turned over the whole farm to be managed by his son implementing permaculture principals. Another presenter was a SA organic farmer who has diversified into worm cast and compost tea production and he offered an engaging and scientifically based discussion on soil condition including moisture retention. Unfortunately there is still a lot of resistance among many farmers in these parts to do anything other than the norm and that, I believe, proves to be the biggest hurdle for farmers upstream rejecting the MDBP. (Another hurdle I see for farmers is the get big or get out attitude promoted by corporations!)

A second solution I suggest is considered by most to be controversial, but I believe we should reconsider the growing of cotton and rice in Australia. I propose that we contemplate industrial hemp as a viable and valuable substitute to the aforementioned crops, more suited to the Australian environment. Industrial hemp is a plant with many uses e.g. fibre for textiles and building materials, oils for pharmaceuticals and I feel it needs to be explored as a serious alternative for farmers and an opportunity for developing localised associated industries for value adding. So we should tick the boxes for environment, society, economy and put it under the scientific microscope.

The third solution is to keep our focus on the environment and our communities and the economy will take care of itself. We need to change laws so that a corporation does not have the same rights as an individual human being. Business will commonly put its shareholders first but there are plenty of examples of businesses succeeding as a direct result of good environmental management and social policies. Of course now we are seeing savvy business adapt to these market influences and a social conscience is gripping the corporate world but our Governments need to take the lead. The Federal Government did this when they initiated an independent authority to come up with the Murray Darling Basin Plan. Why would they change the terms of reference? Because they aren't brave enough to ride out the storm of angry farmers who won't adapt to change, powerful commercial lobbies who know they could lose millions and scare mongers with vested interests who threaten huge job losses. We also need to wake up the majority of society to their habits of consumption. Somehow connect people to the direct and indirect consequences of our self-absorbed consumer ways. The points raised in this paragraph could pose our biggest challenge in saving the Murray and the rest of our natural world. (I think big).

Now for the gripes...There is concern about a little river in SA called the Marne. Its catchment begins on the eastern edge of the Barossa Valley but as it travels the short distance to its mouth at the Murray River at Wongulla, it gets diverted by many dams, then in the Marne Valley aquifers get sucked dry, predominantly by turf and olive farms, and the plethora of its natural springs to not get to fully replenish. There has been an eye witness account of a platypus sighting in the Marne less than 20 years ago.... but now? How many other little rivers like this in Australia? Who usually wins when the environment versus the economy? Not the platypus!

Also of distress is the privatisation of our water supplies and the foreign ownership issues of both farm land and water licences and the question of developers buying water licences i.e., how can we pipe water from the Murray River to a private golf course on the Yorke Peninsula when farmers want to grow food? But then again what is the point of growing food that we export while importing other food stuffs. Hold up the free trade agreements for scrutiny in regard their part of the demise of the Murray River.

We need to look at all forms of extraction of our water resources as well as sources of pollution. Quantity and Quality. What's the use of water if it is dangerous to our health and environment? Consider the petroleum based by-products of water craft on the river. With the advertising of house boat, ski boat, and jet-ski activities along our waterways, the tourism industry (much of it self-regulated) keeps promoting these activities that pollute/contaminate the water, often with accompanying anti-social behaviours and destructive environmental effects on riverbanks, flora and fauna. The tourism industry never addresses the negative aspects of tourism. Only now are there new regulations to get houseboats to not dispose of their black water directly into the river. I have known many houseboat cleaners who have told me that the norm

in the industry is to chuck waste water from cleaning (they use chemical cleaners) overboard. Self-regulating!

And what about councils and government officials who conveniently turn a blind eye to certain developments or lack the funds or training to help the community adjust and make necessary changes or the open mindedness to take the creative lead in things like stormwater harvesting and management. Another pressure brought to bear on our "River of Plenty" is that of population growth and development. For example, the current push to develop the area around Murray Bridge and Mt Barker will bring with it more people with more jet skis and such. What about policing our waterways? What about our understaffed over worked Marine and Harbours personnel? Who pays? It is never the developers or other profiteers! Who is accountable? Lazy officials, greedy moguls, ignorant communities. It is all of us!

I've been an active environmentalist for about 30 years now. Being frugal with electricity and water and planting innumerable trees. If industry keeps getting supported and bailed out while having reaped the financial opportunities and benefits along the way, how will those of us who have done good work in the past be compensated other than to keep paying emergency levees?

I am aware that the issues I have raised are broad but they are all concerns which I and others, hold up for review and investigation.

I was raised in Mannum on the River Murray, where turtles were abundant and you could open your eyes underwater and see a few feet in front of you. I have a personal interest in seeing the Murray River and its tributaries treated with the respect that it deserves, not just with an eye to the seductive economic benefits it provides. **THERE IS NO ECONOMY ON A DEAD PLANET!**

I commend the MDBA for sticking to the terms of their brief. I attended an information session in Murray Bridge. The irony of the venue did not go unnoticed. Watering the racecourse mid- day in relatively warm conditions and having passed several huge pivot systems on the way to attend the meeting with their mist spraying randomly in the wind and evaporating in the heat. Yes SA irrigators are more efficient than their counterparts upstream but we can still do better!

Unfortunately we don't seem to be able to self- regulate very well so maybe we have to introduce new ways to get people to comply with the self-regulating laws of natural sustainability.

I hope that you at least view the Greening the Desert video and see how simple methods can produce amazing and productive outcomes.

I waited a long time to write this submission and I know that I have gone off on a bit of a tangent but I feel better now that I have contributed my thoughts for your consideration.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to participate, and I hope to receive a reply to this correspondence.

Regards

Kitty Schiansky

P.S. The Brazilian government established a department of Permaculture within the ministry of agriculture, as a result of successful Brazilian test case courses. 1996.