



## **Submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of the MDB Plan on Regional Australia**

By Denis Tinkler

I am a sixty year farmer with 43 years experience in irrigation farming near Jerilderie in southern NSW. With my family, I operate a farm in the Murray Irrigation area of operation as well as another farm in the Coleambally area of operations. We grow rice and winter crops and breed and finish prime lambs. I have also been involved with water politics for much of those 43 years including being a foundation Director of Murray Irrigation Limited.

This submission does not canvass all of my concerns with the MDB Plan. Put in the briefest terms, I believe the MDBA have used a flawed process to produce the inevitable flawed Plan. This brief submission is confined to some points which I believe have been given little or no weight in the Plan.

The Plan is little more than a “freshwater solution for the Lower Lakes”. This “solution” has been more political than scientific; it has been driven by South Australian interests that have not looked at the Basin as a whole. I can only comment on the southern connected basin, but I also recognise that Darling River floods and high flows make a significant contribution to the ecology of the lower Murray. The management of these flows via the Menindie Lakes is an important part of securing and optimising water supplies to SA. It would be unwise to discount the value of the Menindie Lakes as short term storage, but it must be acknowledged that evaporation losses could be better managed.

The Plan in its’ present form cannot adequately plan the future of the Basin with the many limitations the Plan has. I wish to outline some of my concerns.

### 1 The Coorong

The south lagoon of the Coorong is suffering hypersalinity and this cannot be influenced to any meaningful extent by flows over the Barrages. The fresh water sources for the south lagoon were historically from south eastern SA, both surface and sub surface. Interception of these flows began as early as 1860 with the Goyder Cut. The south eastern

drains and groundwater pumping in the region have been responsible for the lack of dilution in the south lagoon.

The north lagoon and so called Murray Mouth would be influenced by flows over the Barrages, but the Plan must include the option of removal of the Barrages.

In fact, the Plan should contain a separate plan for the Coorong.

## 2 The Lower Lakes

These lakes have historically been estuarine. I acknowledge that upstream conservation and diversions would mean they would be more often saline than under natural conditions. We cannot turn back time and remove river regulation; I don't think the good people of Adelaide would be happy to be without water for 5 years in each 100.

Evaporation of upwards of 1000 GLs of potable water annually to artificially maintain these lakes as fresh water, in perpetuity, must be questioned.

It appears that it is the tourism industry and not ecological interests that have the most influence on maintenance of the Barrages.

The Plan must at least discuss the merits of removal of the Barrages.

## 3 Locks 1 – 11

The importance of Lock 1 as a barrier to upstream flows is acknowledged. This would have increased importance in the event of Lake Alexandrine becoming saline.

These locks and weirs have seen a fundamental change to the river environment and the Plan should investigate changed regimes to water level management to better mimic nature.

It appears that tourism and reduced pumping costs are the major drivers in maintenance of weir pool levels.

## 4 Saline Groundwater

The ancient history of the lower Murray is that the area has been covered several times by the sea. This ensures that any shallow groundwater will be saline.

There are two areas of concern here that should be addressed by the Plan:

- The local effect of the artificially raised river levels and the predominance of irrigation being adjacent to the river. This makes the lowering of weir pools problematic in that surrounding saline groundwater will flow back to the river.

- The overclearing of the SA mallee region has produced a huge saline groundwater slug. The Plan must account for the possibility of this water entering the river in coming decades.

As an upstream irrigator, I acknowledge that my diversions reduce the amount of dilution flows to the Lower Murray. What I cannot accept is that dilution flows should be the only solution to the problems of that area.

I also believe it would not be in the Nation's interest to destroy upstream food production areas for what may only be a relatively short term fix for the lower river.

I am also concerned that little attention has been paid to the fact that the present river management structure has proved remarkably resilient over this recent and most serious drought. It is a fact that Adelaide's water supply has been maintained when under natural conditions the Murray would have ceased to flow on at least 3 occasions.

Water quality in the lower river has improved considerably as a result of various programs over the last 3 decades and this must be considered by the Plan.

The quoted figure of over 7000 GLs to meet the environmental requirements of the Basin would destroy practically all irrigation and the associated productivity.

The Plan understates the reductions to irrigation by ignoring other buy back programs such as Water for Rivers. Without a serious look at the numbers, the Plan in its present form would cripple agricultural production and therefore the lifeblood of regional communities. The national implications would be considerable.

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