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Submission to the House of Representatives Regional Australia ~~Committee~~ Enquiring into the Impact of the Proposed Murray - Darling Basin Plan.

The 'Plan' is hardly a plan at all but an argument against Civilisation, because of its effect on the environment.

Exactly the same logic ( in this case a return to 60% of pre- european settlement flows: denied in the report but continually used as a reference to confirm modelling) could be applied to recommend dismantling say 80% of our cities to 'increase environmental values and provide improved eco-system services'

Perhaps that's Mike's next 'out of this world' job

Country people rightly feel that this plan is an unwarranted attack on our way of life, which is built around a low energy, 'honest toil', clever resource using food production system that is environment sustaining. Of course the environment is modified in the process, but the improvements to the environment due to irrigation development far outweigh the detrimental effects .

The 'harshening' of the environment experienced in the last 12 years is entirely due to drought. Even without dams no mid sized floods or 'freshes' would have flowed down the system to water the environmental assets referred to in the 'plan'. Instead, without irrigation dams the Murray would have dried to a series of water holes as it did in 1914, 1915, 1923, 1945 and 1946; to which we can add 2006-2009, and possibly 1982. With irrigation dams the rivers have been maintained as 'threads of life' through the worst drought on record, and constant flows have prevented any salt incursions upstream of the estuarine system (lower lakes). With the breaking of the drought this year the whole basin is blooming, the recovery no doubt accelerated by the sources of life provided by the constantly flowing rivers. It is worth noting that the recovery is largely due to within basin rainfall. The dams are refilling without interfering with the recovery process, conserving future irrigation-environmental flows.

That the rivers are indeed 'threads of life' in good condition is shown by the fish kills managed by the M.D.B.A.- these people preaching to us about the environment!. Over the last few years thousands of up to 1 metre long cod and other species have been killed by poorly judged releases of low oxygen or hot water into previously near empty streams. This has occurred from the Wakool River and Meran and Barham Creeks near Barham to the Darling River below Menindie. This 'fish survey technique' and plentiful catches up and down the river show that the top predators and therefore the underlying food chain, are in good shape.

The observations of declining bird numbers have been carried out since the beginning of the drought. The base years from which numbers have declined are years of relatively plentiful irrigation water use: more irrigation may mean more birds. (The opposite conclusion is nonsense) Near Kerang Vic. there is a famous Ibis rookery on a lake used for irrigation supply which has been maintained at its usual water level throughout the drought. Notwithstanding this, Ibis breeding declined severely as the drought continued. Apparently the lack of feed in previously irrigated paddocks had a major effect on bird numbers, not the presence of water for breeding. With the drought broken ( and locusts for feed) the Ibis have re-appeared and are breeding again. Aerial observations of bird numbers are doubtful to say the least. Sketch a map of Australia on an A4 sheet of paper. Draw a horizontal line across the continent. After allowing for the 'dead centre' the field of observation from an aeroplane is 1/20 as thick as your line. There are other examples of doubtful survey results . N.S.W. Fisheries found virtually no cod in the Murray whilst every paper up and down the River carried frequent pictures of recent catches of large cod. The C.S.I.R.O. carried out an aerial survey and reported no Kangaroos left on the Hay Plains years ago. Come sundown the 'roos left their shade and became very visible to the locals.

These are the sorts of uncertain and even conflicting observations (masquerading as science) that are not examined in detail in the 'plan' and are used to justify a policy of de-populating the inland and removing 'city' processing jobs.

The only justification for the 60% of pre-settlement flows being required for environmental well-being seems to be one reference. One would have thought this figure, on which the whole plan hinges, should have at least a chapter devoted to its establishment.

The salinity aspect of the technical report does not even provide data on salinity levels at Morgan, S.A. which have consistently declined. (The whole technical report in fact is almost data free). Instead it warns of possible future rises in salinity and the need for flushing salt from the system. There is no analysis of the contribution of large flow years to flushing the system, or of salt interception works.

Since the mid '90's the M.D.B.C., now the M.D.B.A. have run with the idea that the best way forward for the Murray is to remove water from irrigation. In fact most of the problems of the Murray are in the bailiwick of the M.D.B.A.

The plan should be addressing:

- The condition and safety of the Dams
- The prospects for more Dams
- The capacity of the river channels to take the flows required.

The 'Barmah' choke is one important restriction in the system. The 'green' view is that it should not be tampered with leaving a flow maximum of 8500 Ml/day in place, restricting summer supply down river and thus necessitating the (winter) filling of the estuaries (lower lakes) for Adelaide's water supply.

Deepening or remodelling of flows through/past the Barmah Choke would in fact improve environmental conditions in the vicinity and would allow consideration of a better quality water supply for Adelaide and the 'iron triangle' pipelines.

Summer flows down the river could be increased to directly supply the above requirements with better quality water from further up-river. (Pels Scheme). This would remove the necessity for filling Lake Alexandrina and it could return to natural estuarine conditions (Lake Albert is higher and was in fact soil surveyed in the 1920's - that's how artificial these lakes are.)

- Salt Interception works

Good work has been done in the Mildura area and in S.A.

However the largest single point source of salt remains the Barr Creek in Northern Vic. A limited salt diversion and evaporation scheme operates but is overwhelmed by the amount of water mixed with the salt. N.V.I.R.P. irrigation modernisation works may greatly reduce channel outfalls to the creek rendering the scheme more effective. A discussion of this and the possible need for further salt interception works in this and other areas does not appear in the 'plan'.

- The (so called) Lower Lakes

The need for a satisfactory water supply at the lower end of the system is recognised (see above) but there is nothing so inefficient as a large shallow lake in a hot climate for supplying water for any use.

A saving of a 1 million Ml. (of evaporation) per year by returning the lakes to estuarine conditions should justify spending up to \$15 billion to provide a better quality water supply at the lower end of the system. There is science that shows that more tidal movement in and out of the estuarine mouth would keep it open much of the time and improve the health of the Coorong. Mulloway and other marine life would move into the lakes as before.

- In- System Lakes; Evaporation Losses

A number of lakes are included in the supply system in N.S.W., Vic., and S.A.. They may have catchments, may be required for storage or short-term buffer storage. They all evaporate. The lakes that can be should be excised from the system to save water (and to demonstrate to the South Australians we too are taking some pain)- not mentioned in the 'plan'.

#### Economics

Based on the average gross earning of 1Ml of water in a 'low' end- broad acre application the annual cost of the plans proposal is \$10 billion and 50,000 jobs. (The plans figures are \$ 0.8 billion and 800 jobs.)

Talk of 'resilience' and 'adaptability' (ie. : earning more with less water) actually increase the cost of the plan.

The economic (tourism etc. ) benefits of the plan are in the report but are miniscule compared to the costs.

Capitalising the annual benefits of irrigation requires selecting an interest rate. 4% is about right (x21.4). However if food production is increasing in value relative to the goods by lets say 2% then a 2% capitalisation factor is relevant (x31.4=\$314 billion cost of the 'plan')

If food production is increasing in value relative to other goods by 4% annually, then the benefits are effectively infinite and the 'plan' really proposes 'killing the goose that lays the golden egg'. The real costs of Senator Wong's water buy backs require this evaluation, not the couple of billion quoted by the Wentworth group and others.

#### Australia as an International Citizen

The 'plan gives no thought to Australias' behaviour as an international citizen . When food production decreases prices rise and poor people, including children starve. That is the hard truth. The planned buy backs divert water from food production that would sustain 12 million people.

John Girdwood