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Dear Tony

I am writing to express my dismay regarding the Murray Darling Basin Authority's plan to destroy the irrigation industry and all the communities that depend upon it.

There is a great deal of biased media hype surrounding the Murray Darling river system. Much of the focus is on the lower lakes and water quality there. The water quality in these lakes has been an issue even prior to the installation of the barrages in 1938. There is clearly a problem here that is not the sole responsibility of citizens living in irrigation areas to fix. With the Barrages in place and the opening of the mouth continually dredged to a deep channel, the Coorong will not be revived regardless of how much water is pushed down the river under the guise of an environmental flow. It will however guarantee water for Adelaide and the other South Australian townships dependant on the Murray for water.

The Murray Darling Basin Authority wants to make all water savings in the basin by buying back water from irrigators. They have said there will be no investment on infrastructure to make water savings.

The Government needs to spend its money on improving infrastructure, not on buying water that does not exist during drought periods. We have in Australia an irrigation system that is recognised throughout the world as a leader in the high volume production of clean, high quality produce. International conglomerates recognise the looming food crisis that our planet is facing. They are falling over each other in the scramble to buy Australian Agri-business. We should be investing in our existing irrigation schemes. There are engineering solutions that can save gigitalitres of water from evaporation and seepage.

The proposed cuts to irrigation in our region will lead to the economic collapse of our towns. It will be an enforced drought rather than the natural drought we have endured over the last 10 years. The irrigation industry will not survive as the reduced number of irrigators will still have to pay for the running cost of the whole system. This will make the cost of the water too expensive for most farmers. Industry analysis has shown that cuts of 30% in water will lead to another 20% lost as many farmers are priced out of the business. Our towns have seen population decline, shops close, school enrolments drop by 20% and property values plummet. The only area of growth has been the mental health services that have had to deal with depression and suicide.

Is your policy to pursue this plan regardless of the cost to NSW irrigators?

Would you consider investing in infrastructure rather than buying water entitlements?

Will you address the serious inequity of the plan that makes Adelaide and South Australia big winners at a devastating cost to N.S.W., Victoria and Queensland?

Will you investigate some of the solutions to the conditions of the lower lakes that were put forward by the Murray Darling Basin Commission in 2001?

Michael O'Leary