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There are some who aren't convinced that the environment can reap any real benefit from increased flows. It shouldn't be assumed that it does and more research should be carried out to put the issue beyond doubt.

If it's unambiguously established that additional flows do materially assist the environment then that water should be found other than by attempting to reverse the over allocation of extractions from the rivers by governments in years of plenty. There seems to be only one certain result from buying back water allocations from the successful irrigation industry and that is to put at risk vital primary industries and do untold, irreversible damage to the economic, social and cultural fabric of the numerous basin communities that both serve and rely on them.

The production of food and fibre must not be reduced by the Plan. Their importance, in terms of feeding and clothing millions throughout the world and providing Australia with valuable export income, cannot be over-emphasised. Furthermore those irrigators and water distribution corporations who have already made significant water savings that have already been returned to the environment shouldn't have to endure any further cuts to their entitlements.

The viability of Murray-Darling Basin communities, which not only ably support such industries, but make an important contribution to decentralising our city-centric population, must not be lessened. One example, Griffith, which is almost entirely reliant on irrigated agriculture, is a model of multiculturalism for a nation, whose population had to be, and continues to be, boosted by immigration.

The Water Act which gave birth to the Authority and outlined the parameters of the Plan doesn't go anywhere near far enough to protect the above vital industries or basin communities. The Act needs to be amended to better reflect the above criteria for food and fibre production and the continued viability of basin communities. If the Federal Parliament lacks the necessary power to do so, having relied on the Constitution's external affairs power and its signing of international treaties relating to wetlands and migratory birds, to enact the legislation, then it should either again ask the basin states and the ACT to refer their powers to legislate to the Commonwealth or seek to amend the Constitution to invest it with the necessary power.

Consideration should be given to achieving any further water savings that may be required through a combination of the following:-

1) Infrastructure improvements whether on farm or off, for which a large amount of unspent money has already been earmarked.

2) The reported huge evaporation losses from the Lower Lakes should be reason enough for further research to be undertaken into the effects of opening, if not removing, the barrages at the Murray mouth and allowing it to return to being a natural estuary, which was the situation prior to the basin rivers being regulated.

3) Investigating South Australia's proposals, in recent years, for twin lakes at Lake Alexandrina and a weir at Wellington.

4) Investigating the viability of damming a significant river east of the Great Dividing Range and diverting the stored water into a basin river to augment flows to the south-west, similar to the Snowy Mountains Scheme. I expect the basin states would need to refer their legislative powers to the Commonwealth, or the Constitution would need to be amended, to give the Commonwealth the power to legislate to give effect to such a proposal.

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