



Submission to House Standing Committee on Regional Australia
Inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia
Submitted by Ian Boyle 16 December 2010

My Background and Interest

I lived in Robinvale (in the early days of Solder Settlement), Renmark (I lived there during the 1956 floods), for over 10 years had access to a holiday home at Murray Bridge where I spent most weekends and during the last 30 years our family has spent considerable time in Deniliquin we now have a house there. I am not directly affected by the Basin Plan but have followed this issue with a great deal of interest. I attended the Melbourne Consultation Meeting and have read the 4 volumes of material released by the MDBA on the proposed plan.

The guide to the proposed Basin Plan

The main recommendations of this plan, based on the input of the Best Science available, is that to satisfy the environmental water needs of the Basin man made flooding needs to occur that closely resembles what took place in the Basin prior to any of the Diversion Assets being built. Basically the advice of the Best Scientists is that we turn back time and use the Diversion Assets that have been built over history to make man made floods. The MDBA claims the basin contains around 30000 wetlands with a number of over 2000 that they claim are of significance. The MDBA did not consult with local communities living in the Basin nor relied on any of the knowledge within the Basin to produce the Guide to the proposed Basin Plan. This has resulted in a plan that in theory may work but not in practice and it is just unbelievable to any one that has even the slightest practical knowledge of the Basin that anyone could make such stupid recommendations.

The MDBA has not attributed one positive value to the vision and hard work of our forefather. Those that built the locks and weirs that keep our rivers flowing. Those that worked on the Snowy Mountain Scheme that diverted water back into the Basin. Those that built our dams that store our water. Those that built our diversion systems, including the level banks that control and allow us to use our water more efficiently and make the basin one of the most productive food bowls in the World.

The MDBA has shown no concern regarding the devastating consequences of their recommendations on Basin communities or the financial impact of rendering much of the hard work and assets built redundant. In fact Mike Taylor Chairman of the Authority

has resigned incorrectly still claiming that the environmental water needs come first and everything else second.

It is no wonder this Plan has received the united condemnation it has received from Basin communities.

For those that have taken the time to read the volumes of material released by the MDBA it is just hard to believe that they could get things so wrong.

To give just one example in an area I know well, the MDBA Plan is to flood the Edward River 1-2 times every 10 years at a flow rate of 70000 ML/d and 2 times every 10 years at a flow rate of 30000ML/d. At both these levels the whole area would be underwater. Currently Deniliquin is experiencing flooding at 15000ML/d. But the worst thing about this is that the capacity constraints of the Edward River, which the MDBA are well aware of, won't allow flows anywhere near this. The flow rates can't be achieved and the MDBA has got its plan for the environmental flows wrong.

The downside of the MDBA flooding recommendations

Throughout the Plan a number of downsides to water quality are mentioned but obviously not properly understood by the Best Scientists of the MDBA.

- **Black Water Events**
The MDBA recognizes that these occur but believe they are manageable. They need to say this because they occur during floods. Everyone in Deniliquin knows what they are because we have had black water for the last 5-6 weeks. This Black Water also killed thousands of fish in the Wakool River. Fish the Best Scientists relied on by the MDBA couldn't count claiming the fish numbers were dangerously low. The Basin communities know that flooding the forest and allowing the water to flow back into the rivers creates this Black Water and it is bad for the environment. Our fish don't like it, it has a bad smell and those people from the city that come to visit always ask why the water in the bottom of the toilet is so black.
- **Salt levels**
Salt levels that are too high in our water cause many problems for the environment and for productive farming. The MDBA knows well that the salt loads that naturally occur in the basin are released at far higher levels during flood events. They know well that there Plan to more frequently flood the Basin will increase the salt levels and undo the work that has been done reducing these salt levels through the Salt Reduction Programs.
- **Suspended sediment levels**

We all know how these increase during flood levels. It's on television nearly every day now as they follow the floods we now have throughout the basin. Our rivers do not flow through pristine rock and sandy bases.

- Nutrients and Algal toxins
All increase substantially during flood events

The MDBA plan is full of inaccuracies. How is it that on Best Scientific advice we have completely different requirements for irrigation water and environmental water? Farmers who use water for irrigation have to go to great lengths to ensure that this water does not flow back into our river systems and pollute our rivers. MDBA Scientists believe that for the environment we need to create man made floods and allow this runoff water back into our river systems. The MDBA Plan is simply not going to work.

The Base needs not only to survive but grow in line with anticipated population growth

Australia's population is predicted to double by 2030. World population is growing at a faster rate. We need to make our most productive food bowl even more productive. We need to build more infrastructures to provide for our water needs not only to produce more food but to ensure we have water for our growing population even through the worst droughts. We obviously need more dams and more "Snowy Mountain Schemes" or similar visionary schemes that allow us to expand our production and keep our environment safe.

No major new infrastructure built in over 50 years

The MDBA details well the history of the development of weirs, locks, dams, levy banks, the Snowy Mountain Scheme that turned water back into the Basin and other diversion assets that were built by our Forefathers Infrastructure that was built over 50 years ago that keep our rivers flowing even in one of the worst drought events. Our forefathers did this with great vision, foresight and hard work, with a lot less resource and capability that we have today. Since then our population has over doubled and will double again by 2030 but where is our vision setting out a plan to build the infrastructure we desperately need to support our growth and that of the world? No we have the MDBA with a plan to trash the Basin communities that have work so hard with our old infrastructure, to lower not increase the productivity of the Basin and to render billions of dollars of assets in the Basin to the scrap heap.

Summary

The Guide to the proposed Basin Plan has already caused great harm to Basin communities. It has caused tremendous stress and anxiety. They know that if a Plan like this was implemented the impact on the Basin would be horrific. They know that the Proposed Plan will not work. They also know through previous experiences that they are not being listened to regardless of the facts they present. The closing down of the timber industry and the forests are a good recent example of this. They have learnt well the lesson in politics that was explained to them. Preferences from the Greens were more important to politicians than the livelihoods of Basin communities they destroyed.

Action is the only thing Basin communities believe in now and they are not going to sit idly by watching non affected people wreck what they and their forefather have worked so hard to build.

The words of National Farmers' Federation president Jock Laurie sum up the MDBA plan well and I quote. **“The guide in its current form cannot be revived and there is no prospect of it being a workable basis for the eventual Basin Plan. The government and the MDBA now have no choice but to throw out the guide and start again. Regional communities do not, and will not accept this guide or any basin plan that this guide underpins. Full stop. It’s dead.”**

We need to move on from this quickly. Every day that goes by damages the Basin community further and is stopping the post drought recovery that would have happened by now if it was not for this stupid plan.

Ian Boyle