



Inquiry into the Impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia

As an environmentalist, I am well aware that the Murray-Darling Basin needs prompt attention because previous over-allocation of water in the Basin has almost brought the Basin to its knees. It is necessary that something has to be done to preserve the rivers in the Basin but there should be a balance between the cuts considered for environmental water, irrigation, mining, industry forestry. Cities outside the Basin, such as Melbourne should not be allowed to take water from the Basin for their use whilst people who live and work in the Basin should have permanent rights set into their State's Water Act so that their water is not used outside the Basin.

The environment has always been the last issue to be considered and whilst water trading is allowed, there will never be enough water available for the environment. It is ridiculous that water can be bought by anyone, including overseas countries at the expense of people living in Australia.

- The Basin Plan has indicated that Sunraysia and the City of Mildura will be one of the Basin areas that will be particularly affected, and thousands could leave the area. The Social-Economic affects have not been taken into account in the Plan and an in depth report should be done before the Plan is taken any further. Loss of population will mean loss of services down the track. Professional people will leave the area and will not be prepared to come to a city with social-economic problems. We already suffer isolation from major cities but currently have most professional services needed to cater for our community. These will disappear.
- It is important that this Plan is not rushed and surely the recent rains, mean water will be secure for at least another two years, allowing plenty of time to get this Plan right for everyone including the environment, irrigators, and towns.
- It is clear that a balance of needs must be fully considered before a Draft Plan is released. This must address the needs of the environment, irrigators, towns and industry (not necessarily in that order). We all know what the environment needs; i.e. more water and understand that the MDB catchment is over-allocated; in fact it is continuing to be over-allocated. However, I raise the question about the rigor of the Authority's knowledge about the direct impacts, both long and short term, of the implementation of the proposed Cap on communities in the Basin.
- There will never be enough water available whilst Water Trading is allowed to continue. Damage to waterways has been dramatically increased because of water trading and unbundling from properties. Water should not have become a commodity and I find it immoral that overseas countries can actually own water from Australian Rivers whilst local producers no longer have access to it. The huge social impact caused by the above practices which today allows thousands of hectares to be opened up for MIS schemes and large corporations to the detriment of the family irrigators who have worked their

properties for over 100 years should stop if the health of the Murray is to be improved and if the Murray Valley Food Bowl is to be able to continue with the production of food. There is a world shortage of food currently, and if Victoria, through the Murray Irrigation Districts, forces these areas to cease production due to zero irrigation, then Victorians will be paying huge prices and face a food shortage in the future. Permanent plantings cannot survive on zero irrigation: the huge areas of plantings already dying or being removed in Sunraysia are of great concern, and neither can vegetables grow without water. The Sunraysia area for one, produces huge tonnages of vegetables and without water these will cease to operate and the social impact will be huge.

- Irrigation use in Sunraysia is already one of the most efficient areas in Australia, yet it appears to be one of the areas to be most severely punished.
- The question about the efficient use of this limited natural resource by irrigators and towns, environment and industry has to be fully and rigorously pursued before final decisions are made. 'Business-as-usual' is no longer an option, due to land use changes, an expanding population, an expanding need for food and water, and acknowledgement of the progression and impacts of climate change.
- The Government instead of proposing to remove up to 60% of water for irrigation from the area, should improve infrastructure and help irrigators to become more efficient. I know local irrigators who have installed drip irrigation over their properties complete with solar-powered probes indicating how much water is needed and when it is required. They claim to have saved 60% of water used in the past. If this occurred over all properties, there would be no need to take water off any of the irrigators. Those who have not already changed over to drip irrigation, cannot afford to because of the cost of water in the past, drought and the Victorian Government placing zero allocation on these irrigators over periods of time. Government help with infrastructure would certainly help solve many of their problems.
- Prior to this century, even with over-allocation the rivers survived reasonably well. During wet years, irrigators in Sunraysia used less water and this water remained in water storages for use for the environment during dry years. It was not perfect, but it worked and only recently with the use of every drop of water due to water trading allowing huge acreage to be opened up, have we seen our beautiful Murray dying in front of our eyes.

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