



16 December 2010

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Committee Secretary,  
Standing Committee on Regional Australia  
P O Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

My problem is where to start on a flawed document Guide to Basin Plan on a flawed assumption.

The document claims to be and was introduced as a consultative process; however on page XVII the heading is Mandatory Decisions and says there will be a reduction of between 3 and 4 million megalitres from productive use. That is not consulting it is commanding! It also states the environment takes priority over drinking water!

The flawed assumption is that irrigation has had a negative impact on the natural ecosystems in the river. Without the upper river valley storages which were built for irrigation and flood mitigations and power generation the rivers would have ceased to flow on several occasions over the past years.

Irrigators have been denied the use of this water. In some years our allocation has been zero. Other years a small percentage of allocation, sometimes at the end of the season when it is of minimal use, the river has never dried up. The term over allocation is a technical term only as each year the available water is shared among users in a formula to give some fairness. The problem that has been somewhat recently occurred is the trading of water, especially the separation of irrigation water from the land and trading between river valleys. Even trading to non landholding entities, purely a gambling chit.

Aware that we have just come through the longest dry period since records were kept my observations are that here and where we have traveled in the basin is that nature has adapted and the resilience is obvious.

I have been on this property, which is in the Murray River flood plain, all my life. My maternal great grandfather and paternal grandfather being on neighbouring properties to our present abode. I am confident there are more river gums and more native fish in the river than any of us remember – though not an authority on frogs I can assure you there are times when it is hard to sleep because of the noise they make in our rice fields.

If water is deemed to be needed for whatever purpose the building of new storages in the headwater is the best long term solution; the excuse it would never rain again has floated away. This negative attitude has been very costly in the last few months in the form of flood damage and water lost to the ocean.

Are we not worried about rising sea levels?

If the South Australian Irrigators who pump from the lower lakes want efficient use of water there needs to be a division weir built at Wellington.

Is there to be a cut off point where it would be agreed the environment had sufficient: then more could be used for production of food?

As irrigated agriculture is vastly more productive on a per hectare than dry farming, curtailing irrigation would mean more land would have to be cleared to feed the growing population.

We have spent our lives and assets improving the efficiency of our operation, especially the irrigation management of the farm, our son is continuing to do likewise. The banks have been supportive for they appreciate the improved productivity this brings to their asset. If more water is taken away so is productivity, so credit would evaporate. We would all be gone.

There have been mixed fortunes for past generations of our families – we have persevered so far, are still here after fire, drought, flood, rabbits, locusts, deregulation and free trade to name a few problems. We now seem to be threatened from politicians, bureaucrats and academics to name some others. I believe I owe it to my forebears who not only pioneered the land under extreme conditions but also three of my uncles and my father have their names on the local Honor Roll of WWI veterans, my father also served in New Guinea in WWII. My wife's family were also pioneers in this district so you would say we have both an affinity with the land and a responsibility to past and future generations. Our son is the current operator and some of his sons' first words were "tractor" and "header".

It seems farmers have been blamed for the drought and big brother has decided it would never rain again. I ask your committee to approach the question of water allocation with an open mind realizing that food cannot be grown without water each growing season. The environment can survive dry periods, that is for all to see now as it only started to rain a few months ago and the landscape is blooming. The way to secure more water is the building of more storages.

I understand the original River Murray Water Agreement took 12 years to formulate – let there be a real study of the basin before any further Agreement is formulated.

Yours sincerely

John Groutsch