



I am a fourth generation Australian farmer and was born into a grazing family near Jerilderie NSW. I am 52 years of age and have witnessed an outdoor life on the land and have seen how each year is different from the last and brings a new set of rewards and problems to solve and overcome. My feedback is not scientific but based on practical experience. I may not be entirely correct in every detail but I hope my feedback may be of help to your decision making process.

The Murray Darling Basin has now come out of drought and is entering a time of above average rainfall for the next period of years. The long dry period of 16 years at "Bowmanville" Jerilderie I shall call the 'Millennium Drought' (1994-2010) will repeat again in approximately 50 years time. Past rainfall records indicate this 50 year cycle of dry times then wet times. E.g. Federation drought, Second World War drought and this Millennium drought just ended. All were devastating to agriculture and the rural town economy's dependant on it. This last drought the 'Millennium drought' was actually a period of six droughts in a row (each approximately eighteen month long) and the culmination of too many dry years and quadruple stockfeed prices undermined most livestock farmers' ability to cope. By November 2008 we had to sell most of our stock.

After these prolonged dry periods end, it is amazing how quickly the natural environment recovers when it gets wet again. My photos show this recovery. It is so wet everywhere at the moment. All the usually dry swamps are full of water and water birds. Most of the internal farm access roads are cut by water across them at various places. All the dry water courses and low lying areas are inundated and will be so for months.

In the Riverina of NSW where it is relatively flat, there is little or no run off from rainfall until the ground is saturated. Rivers are basically formed by excess water that runs off once the environment has had its fill. Once the environment has had its fill wetlands form which become the breeding grounds of mosquito born and other diseases such as Murray Valley Encephalitis, Ross River fever, etc.

Natural conditions are those that provide the environment with dry and wet periods. These dry periods control diseases.

Artificially keeping the environment wet will break that control on these diseases. We can expect exponential increases in human, livestock and wildlife health problems if there are no dry periods to control disease along the river systems and wetlands.

Short wet periods help trees to recover and regenerate. Prolonged wet periods can drown trees. This is evidenced by the numerous dead trees found in manmade lakes such as those formed after damming up rivers or where wetlands, creeks and streams are artificially kept at higher than natural levels.

3000 Giga litres of water is equal to 3,000,000 Mega litres of water that has been mentioned to be purchased from willing sellers for the environment which is currently saturated already.

If we assume an average irrigation farm is 1,000 acres with 1,000 Mega litres of water. That equates to 3000 highly productive irrigation farms that will be lost to production if their water is 'purchased' from them for the environment.

We can assume these farmers grow 2 tonnes of food per acre per mega litre of water per year. Then 3000 Giga litres of water can potentially grow 6,000,000 tonnes of food, fuel or fibre. That's 240,000 semi trailer loads of food etc that won't reach the supermarket each year.

Perhaps it would be wiser to find another way of sourcing the water for the environment. The 75 Giga litre Melbourne pipeline could be reversed to add water to the Murray Darling basin when Melbourne storages are full.

40 such pipelines from various sources of coastal rivers around Australia could provide 3000 Giga litres of water for the environment instead.

Kel Robertson

















