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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

I would like to provide a submission to your inquiry into the socio-economic impact of the Murray-Darling Basin and the development and implementation of the Basin Plan by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA).

I have lived and worked in the Riverina, NSW my entire life and I take great pride in our regions community spirit and its ability to maintain productivity whilst experiencing adversity. I am 31yr old mother of three young boys, happily married, working fulltime, and have proudly completed two university degrees (BAppSc (Food Science) and MMgt). I am also qualified RABQSA HACCP auditor, Chemcert qualified, and have completed multiple TAFE level qualifications. With this in mind, I kindly ask that you take my feedback as being a passionate and honest submission.

The proposed basin plan as released to the community on the 8th October makes a mockery of the good work that multiple generations have put in place to develop Australia to the standard of living and productivity that we currently enjoy. The concepts presented are so completely flawed in their assumptions of regional communities and their use of irrigation allocations that I am boggled as to where to begin to provide adequate feedback, short of stating that the last 3 years (or more) that have been spent on this plan have resulted in a unusable document.

To refer to the draft plan, Volume 1: page 197, where it is noted regarding the quality of information accessible for development of the plan. The fact that in the MDBA's own opinion they do not believe their evidence base was strong

for all parameters of analysis, indicates that the best available science is not available or was not made available to the authority and thus the document is an interpretation of a limited range of knowledge. This is not adequate footing to make decisions that will impact on the livelihood of thousands of Australians, nor to decide what is best for our native environment.

I read the plan in eagerness to understand how the MDBA proposes that the 3000 - 7600GL of water would be utilised for the environment. I am keen to understand what flow rate is required to water the environment, what volumes are to be delivered to where and when would this be conducted. I am interested in how the water will be delivered to the sites that are deemed as in need of this additional water. I was terribly let down when I read that none of this detail is included as the MDBA write on page 163 that the states within the Murray-Darling Basin will determine the priorities of the watering plan. How can they possibly have done the models to calculate the volume of water required for the environment yet they cannot state how that water is to be used. This flaw in their argument for water buyback negates all previous detail, because if they cannot state how the water will be used then how could they possibly have accurately conducted work to determine the volume.

This gap in the presented knowledge leads me to my next layer of confusion. The plan is suggesting that the irrigation of crops must use the latest technology of available infrastructure in order to maintain productivity on the reduced availability of water, yet there is no suggestion of infrastructure for environmental irrigation. I have suggested using their feedback process that they include this into their modelling to revise the volume required for the environment, as piping water from rivers and creeks will require a lower water level than the flooding of rivers to get the water level to flow naturally into wetland areas. This will also minimise the damage to neighbouring farms, and enable more land to be used for productive use.

Following from this, have they considered the environmental implications of having water in the environment for unnatural amounts of time? For example, increased land degradation and erosion, maintenance of introduced species and pest populations, salinity and water table implications. The Australian native flora and fauna have survived the drought with minimal disruption in species volumes and we have all seen the return of frogs and birdlife to our regions following from recent flooding rains. Our native species are tolerant to drought and have evolved to be able to survive.

There is also the extremely obvious situation that we are experiencing now in rural Australia following from floods. We are now faced with our 'once-in-100-years' flood, and can use this time to measure and monitor flora and fauna, as

well as wetland response and volumes required to reach certain flood points. I trust that the MDBA and other relevant authorities (eg. CMA, State departments) are utilising their funding to research the return of species to the wetland areas following from this experience, to monitor what is actually needed in real life, rather than trusting the models alone.

I appreciate there is a need to ensure the environment is maintained. I frequently take my children to enjoy the Murrumbidgee River and go for bush walks in our local Cocopaira National Park. This is our environment and this is why we live here. I do not see a need for a drastic change in the availability of water, as the environment is not suffering to the extent that the plan assumes that it is. We have just experienced a 10 year drought and throughout this period our river did not dry up and our productivity adapted to the conditions with people leaving the farm and working in alternative industry for a period of time. The farming community has rejoiced in the prospect of returning to the farm and their passion for the land.

I request that the plan is revisited, and some reality is injected into the proposal to ensure that a future document is a balanced representation. A document that takes into consideration the actuality of our growing global population and the need maintain the triple bottom line approach we, as a community, deserve.

I also request that the indication that rice and cotton are huge water users is a terribly poor use of information made available to the MDBA. There are other commodities that use much more water but their inclusion of these two examples of crops that cannot be grown in the future in our region further exasperates the poor quality of research conducted. It is not their place to indicate crops that should or should not be grown under water availability scenarios.

Through years of research and development undertaken by the Department of Primary Industries and the work conducted by the CSIRO, we are seeing significant changes in water use efficiency through breeding programs and farming techniques being improved. This advancement in skill and technology needs to be continued and applied to the environmental watering plans where possible to maximise on our asset, not allow it to run out to sea at a flow rate much heavier than the ocean needs.

The scenario of a national reconfiguration of growing crops in alternative locations around Australia is not feasible on the grounds that the climate within the MDB is the best suited to growing crops profitably due to the intricate combination of good soil, low humidity, good seasonal temperatures,

close proximity to Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide ports for global distribution, close proximity to bulk of Australian consumptive market, and good quality water and infrastructure availability. The simple notion that MBD residents should move to the Ord River (for example), is so simplified it is laughable. The concept would mean instantaneous drastic drop in land values in the MDB resulting in whole populations being in poverty and unable to afford land in alternative locations.

Foreign ownership of Australia's agricultural assets is another disaster waiting to happen, as other countries gain more and more land and water assets we will reach a tipping point where food for our nation will not be the priority of our own land, as the production will be entirely for the survival of the foreign ownership. Why is it that other nations see food production as a priority and are willing to invest in arable land, yet our own country is making plans to reduce food production?

The proposed cuts are ridiculous and will decimate our community. This message I am sure that the MDBA have heard loud and clear through the community consultations. I sincerely hope that their second draft is significantly different to the first. I have also requested to them through their feedback website that if they are not confident with the available data, that they declare the issue to the Government and ask that more time be allocated to enable a better plan to be written.

Finally, I thank you for recognising a need for an inquiry into the socio-economic impacts of Murray Darling Basin Authority's Basin Plan and wish you the best in your task of finding suitable recommendations for the future of Australia's food bowl.

Kind Regards,

Kristy Bartrop