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Submission Number: 308

Date Received: 17/12/2010

6th December 2010

RECEIVED

17 DEC 2010

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The Chair

Mr Tony Windsor MP,

Standing Committee on Regional Australia,

GPO Box 6021,

CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

Submission on the Guide to the Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan

The Renmark Paringa Council is one of three local government authorities in the Riverland Region of South Australia and our district is the location of the first irrigation colony in Australia. Our region is the most significant horticultural area in South Australia and is totally reliant on the River Murray for its economic and social wellbeing. We are also proud of the fact that our region's irrigators utilise some of the most efficient water delivery systems in Australia.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Guide to the Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan and also to thank the Authority for visiting Renmark to meet with our community and to provide opportunities for them to hear firsthand what the Authority proposes and to ask questions.

The Authority will have recently received a submission from the South Australian River Communities (SARC) group on which this Council is represented. We fully support the submission made by SARC which we believe to be representative of the general community opinion. In addition to the submission by SARC we make the following specific points.

The Renmark Paringa Council is supportive of a sustainable River Murray system and the need to develop and implement a long term plan which will ensure that the river system provides for a healthy river and sustainable food production which are the key to strong and vibrant regional communities.

Council is disappointed that the Guide does not recognise the irrigation efficiencies that have been achieved in our region over the past 30 or so years through personal investment by our irrigators without funding support from Government. While we are supportive of the Federal Governments initiative to provide funding for upgrades to inefficient water delivery and use systems in other parts of the Basin we believe that the past investment by our irrigation community should be recognised

in a tangible way. We have demonstrated that that savings in water use can be achieved through modernisation of infrastructure and efficient water use on farm.

The introduction of the proposed Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) does not recognise our existing efficiencies and consequently any reduction in available water for irrigation will have a direct and immediate impact on production. Consequently the proposed SDL's will have a far greater socio-economic impact on our region than they will in any other part of the Basin. The Renmark Paringa Council is therefore unable to support the SDLs proposed within the Guide.

We would suggest that the savings that will be made by the Federal Government in not having to fund infrastructure upgrades in our region be used to offset significant portions of the total volume of water to be recovered. We believe that the "Basin with no Borders" approach would support the majority of water savings being made "upstream" and the sharing of the benefits of those savings to improve the ecological health assessment of the lower reaches of the Basin.

Council also suggests that water savings could be achieved through increased efficiency in the delivery of ecosystem services and that these savings could reduce the volume of water that is proposed be found from irrigation communities.

While recognising the importance of sufficient volumes of water for critical human needs the MDBA have acknowledged that Australia has a proportionally higher per capital use of water than other developed countries. We believe that the Guide should address the need for improvements in the efficiency of critical human needs water deliver and use. Such gains could be used to improve the environmental well being of the Basin without such a need to reduce water available for food production.

The Renmark Paringa Council is very supportive of a national or "Basin without Borders" approach to management of the Murray Darling Basin however such management planning should, while recognising the importance of the environmental health of the Basin, also take account of the economic and social well being of the river communities.

In closing we urge the Authority to progress, with caution, the early completion and implementation of a Murray Darling Basin Plan as the uncertainty created by proposed changes are having a significant impact on the health and well being of our community members.

Yours Faithfully,

Neil Martinson
MAYOR