



# WENTWORTH GROUP

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## OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS

Mr Peter Cosier, Prof Tim Flannery, Prof Hugh Possingham FAA, Prof David Karoly, Prof Quentin Grafton, Dr Neil Byron  
Dr Ronnie Harding, Mr Robert Purves AM, Dr Denis Saunders AM, Prof Bruce Thom, Dr John Williams, Prof Mike Young.

The Hon Tony Windsor MP  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on  
Regional Australia  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

20<sup>th</sup> December 2010

  
Dear Mr Windsor

We are writing with respect to the Inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia.

For over 100 years Australians have argued over the waters of the Murray-Darling Basin. We are acutely aware that water is a scarce resource. We know that as we developed extraction industries in the Basin we have left too little water in the rivers to sustain a healthy river system. As a result we face a real risk that the ecosystems supporting the river system will collapse, undermining the businesses and communities that depend on it.

If we are to achieve the objectives of national water reform by returning overallocated rivers to sustainable levels of extraction and protect, restore and provide for the ecological values and ecosystem services in a manner that maximises the net economic returns, water reform must be seen as an opportunity for major structural adjustment of regional communities.

If we do it well we have the opportunity to bring together all those who live and work in the community, who do not always share the same perspective or priorities, to work together to achieve the shared goal of a sustainable future.

What is essential to this approach is that communities must be given the opportunity to lead the process within a framework where the Minister approves any funding for plans that are developed.

For this reform to succeed, any proposals for the future of Basin communities must be developed with and owned by those communities, as it is only they can ensure the necessary changes are made to have a viable future with less water.

The science within the *Guide to the proposed Basin Plan* is robust and provides a clear picture of the water needed if we are to have a healthy river system. The challenge now is to work through a process with the Basin communities using the resources available to deliver the water to the river and strategic regional development.

Central to this is our strong view that the Authority should not release a Draft Basin Plan until a community adjustment mechanism is established which resources communities to work with the government to plan for a future with less water.

The Australian Government has committed \$8.9billion through its *Water for the Future* program to undertake this reform. It is important therefore that the Inquiry look not only at the potential for negative impacts as a result of the release of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan but also the potential for long term positive impacts.

As a contribution to the Inquiry, the Wentworth Group attach two exhibits which address areas where the Group has knowledge. These are: the Wentworth Group's June 2010 report *Sustainable Diversions in the Murray-Darling Basin*, and; our formal submission to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority on the *Guide to the proposed Basin Plan*.

The areas of these documents which address the Inquiry terms of reference are outlined in more detail below:

- The direct and indirect impact of the proposed Basin Plan on regional communities is addressed on pages 16 – 18 in the June report and more broadly in the submission to the Authority. We do not directly address the impacts on specific agricultural industries.
- The efficiency of water saving measures through infrastructure investment is addressed on pages 19 and 20 of the June report and water return volumes are provided on a catchment by catchment basis in the Summary and pages 12 to 18 of the June report.
- The role of governments, the agricultural industry and the research sector in developing and delivering infrastructure and technologies aimed at supporting water efficiency in the Murray-Darling Basin is not addressed in this submission.
- Measures to increase water efficiency and the cost effectiveness of these measures are addressed on pages 19 and 20 of the June report. Opportunities for economic growth and diversification in regional communities is addressed in the submission to the Authority and pages 22 to 25 of the June report.
- International examples of reform and structural adjustment programs and the impact on communities and regions are identified on page 23 of the June report.

We would be pleased to discuss these recommendations with your Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Cosier

On behalf the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists