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Dear Tony,

I am a conservative style constituent living in the Patterson electorate, retired military officer (25 years service) currently flying with Qantas Airways Ltd. I understand you have been appointed to chair a Parliamentary Inquiry into the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) proposal for restoration of environmental flow to the river system in response to the hostile reception to the proposal by affected communities.

I appreciate that the MDBA analysis was set in an environmental context in accordance with the Authority's terms of reference. As a consequence I suspect the Authority's consideration of solutions outside the naturally available water flow was constrained, hence the proposal to take water from irrigators and return it to the environment. While there is significant merit in improved water management practices, the reality is that nature cannot provide consistent sufficient water to satisfy the demands on the system and regardless of any redistribution that evolves from the current deliberations the argument will remain unsettled. New demands for further redistribution will emerge during the next big dry.

As human intervention (irrigation) has interfered with the natural health and environmental quality of the river system, I am of the conviction that the only way to sustain our productive capacity and restore the environment is to intervene again and directly replace the water we extract. I penned a letter to the Editor of The Australian that reasonably succinctly expresses my position; it was published on Monday 18 Oct and is repeated here for reference:

[Both Labor and the Greens promote their progressive credentials yet virtually every initiative conceived by the duo is only selectively progressive and invariably incorporates significant punitive actions against large swaths of the national interest. The Murray Darling Basin Authority guidance is a case in point - very environmentally progressive but very regressive in terms of food security, national productivity, regional welfare and decentralization.

We need to recognise that the Murray Darling Basin must remain a viable food production asset just as we recognise that the environment is degraded because we (human intervention) have extracted too much water. The most logical and progressive solution is therefore for us to intervene again and replace the water extracted rather than simply limit access to the water. I'm proposing that we replenish the water through strategically located desalination plants on the East coast feeding the water via reservoirs on the West Divide down rivers such as the Warrego, Balonne, Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and even the Murray itself. The project will be costly to both implement and sustain but that is a cost worth carrying and a cost that should be borne by all Australians not just by the Murray Darling Basin communities.

Certainly, implement improved water management practices to minimize waste but let's do something universally progressive (positive) in the national interest and replace the water directly rather than recover the water through punitive action.]

Tony, there is quite a bit more to this proposal than I have indicated in the letter to the editor such as: broadening the area of arable

land available in the mid-west and encourage population/industrial shift from the coast, extracting hydro power as the water is released, introducing nuclear power to supply the desal plants (even the latte drinking urban greens might support that initiative), develop tourism options around the reservoirs (camping, bush walking, fishing, canoeing etc), using the desal plant salt slurry as a chemical resource and therefore free up tracts of urban land currently used as evaporation pans for salt production, and there are probably more spin-offs that I haven't thought of.

The investment cost could be funded by a levy on SA, VIC, NSW and QLD resident's water bills for say 5 years, and then the running cost progressively transferred to the direct water users over say a ten year period. As we are quite capable of finding \$3.0B to buy back water licences, surely we could find the finance to deliver a very positive national project such as I have proposed.

The major point is to do something POSITIVE rather than impose a NEGATIVE solution on a section of our society and further devalue the nation, force population drift to the coast and diminish regional development options.

Tony, I'm hoping your terms of reference will allow you to consider options outside the simple "give and take" model that appears to prevail in contemporary society and that an option along the lines of my proposal will receive a conscientious, objective consideration.

Appreciate your indulgence.

Best Regards

Ron Haack