



BRAITHWAITE & CO

19 December 2010

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

By email: ra.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Sirs and Madam,

We refer to the draft Murray Darling Basin Plan (the **Plan**). We understand that you have been requested to undertake an inquiry into the Plan.

We are strongly opposed to the Plan and consider that if the Plan were implemented there would be severe detrimental effects on our business, our family and our community. In our view, the Plan ought never be implemented in its current form.

We set out below our comments and feedback on the Plan. We would appreciate if you would carefully consider our comments when undertaking the inquiry and completing your report.

1. Our Business

Braithwaite Co is a family farming agriculture business located around 32kms from Griffith, New South Wales. We own and operate three farms that have been in our family for three generations. The three farms are all irrigation properties and we grow rice, wheat, oats, canola, barley and also run sheep and from time to time, cattle.

We are presently a viable profitable agricultural business and the business supports two families. We employ one worker full time and also employ up to 10 men during busy times during the season such as harvest time, shearing etc.

2. Direct and indirect impact of the Plan on our Business

There is a direct correlation with our businesses profitability and the amount of water that is available to us. Put simply, in years when we have full allocation, it is possible to plant land to crops, to provide the crops with the desired water levels and to maximise yields. In the years where water is not available to us, such as in the preceding 10 years of drought, our business suffers and cannot operate. In short, Braithwaite and Co is heavily reliant on water. Without irrigation water, our properties could not sustain the levels of cropping and livestock that they do with irrigation water. It is important that you do not lose sight of the simple fact that agriculture is heavily reliant on water.

If the Plan was implemented in its current form, we firmly believe that our business would no longer exist. Our family would not have the ability to make a livelihood in Griffith. We have done some figures on the likely percentage of water allocation that Braithwaite and Co would receive if the Plan was implemented, those figures suggest that our business would be non-existent.

If the Plan were implemented and our water allocation was to be reduced by the percentages contemplated by the Plan then:

- we could not maintain the same level of crop plantings;
- we could not support livestock on our properties every year, if at all;
- it would not be viable to grow rice at all;
- it is unlikely that our family would be able to be financially supported by the farms;
- my sons family would not be able to be financially supported by the farms;
- my son and I would both need to find work elsewhere, and for a time may be unemployed;
- Braithwaite and Co would not be able to afford to employ any other person;
- those families that rely on income from their husbands working on our farms would be adversely effected;

The severe adverse effects to our business that we describe above is a realistic prospect should the Plan be implemented.

Our business is not alone in facing the situation described about, in our view, it is likely that almost all of the agricultural businesses in the Riverina would be faced with the same issues and would be forced to close their doors. It follows that the entire community must suffer from this reduction in the agricultural economy.

We have already invested extensively into increasing the water efficiency of our land, a fact that is overlooked. We spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in land forming all of our farms for the sole purpose of increasing water efficiency. We have constructed one sided channels, water stops, water

recycling facilities – all with the purpose of increasing water efficiency. In contrast, to my knowledge there has not been new a dam built in Australia in over 50 years, despite the population growth. Infrastructure development is one aspect of water reform that requires further consideration.

In my view, there needs to be a complete review of the impact that water saving measures have already had on farming businesses. In particular, Braithwaite & Co has already lost 40% of water entitlements over the preceding years 10 years. This has already had a severe impact on our business, particularly during a time of drought. The Plan fails to consider the impact that the previous reforms have had on agriculture.

I am strongly opposed to the Plan and consider it to be a narrow minded and entirely unsatisfactory approach to the issue of water. The Plan presently completely ignores that agriculture is heavily reliant on water and it must consider the impact of the Plan on agricultural businesses and the communities that are supported by agriculture.

Yours faithfully,

Braithwaite & Co