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Submission to Guide to the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan
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'The struggle over the world's water resources will be the defining struggle of the twenty-first century, and the battle has already been joined.' 'The best measure of how a democracy functions is how it distributes the goods of the land; the air, water, wandering animals, fisheries, and public lands, otherwise known as the "public trust" or the "commons." By their nature these resources cannot be reduced to private property but are the shared assets of all the people, held in trust for future generations.' Robert F. Kennedy Jr.



The Darling River at Lelma Station NSW near Wentworth -in drought 22 January 2008 photo by Maria Riedl

Maria I E Riedl

Firstly, I would like to thank the Murray Darling Basin Authority for allowing us the opportunity to have two bites at the cherry! It is to your credit that you took the time to release this Guide to the proposed MDB Plan and encouraging the community to have input at the basement level of this proposed change to the Cap on the MDB system.

I attended 3 presentation sessions: one in Mildura, one in Melbourne and one in Renmark. The respect shown by the Authority to the concerns of those communities and individuals who will be impacted and those that were interested was exemplary. This is what community consultation is about; really listening to individuals and their concerns, no matter how hard it is.

I have sent you about 36 emails with loads of information that I have gathered on water and the environment. Please take it and use it as you see fit.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr who I quoted in my introduction also said that 'only vigorous protests by citizens have kept corporations from privatizing the water supplies of public trust water supplies' and that in other areas of America there is 'a more subtle but equally effective privatization of public trust waters [occurring], as governments subsidize reckless and unsustainable water usages that favour greedy developers, powerful utilities, and agribusiness barons over the American public' and 'destructive government policies are draining our nations' rivers and aquifers and trampling our democratic rights.' He goes on by using the Colorado River as, '[having] nothing more to give, and a train wreck is imminent. But while scientists continue to sound the warning, the river managers insist on business as usual, encouraging wasteful agricultural uses, the proliferation of urban sprawl, and dramatic increases in consumption.' Further he says ' [A]mericans need to be aware of their rights and the jeopardy corporate power places them in. Democracy affirms individual rights to our natural resources. But those rights cannot survive without a courageous citizenry that insists that its government not merely cater to commerce and industry but aggressively protect its citizenry's right to good health; safe air, water, and food; and the enrichment of America's national heritage and God's creation.'¹

Though Mr Kennedy talks about America, surely we in Australia should be looking at the many examples of over allocation of our limited natural water resources that is already evident in other parts of the world! We cannot and must not continue along the 'business-as-usual' path. The impacts in over extraction and misuse of water in other parts of the world are documented and can be easily researched. The facts are before us; now we need to ensure that a balance is struck between human use of water and the needs of the environment.

I have many books that have been written by knowledgeable people who write that water as the 'defining crisis of the twenty-first century'² There are just so many examples of what happens when man plays with nature at the expense of nature. The book by Fred Pearce (see footnote) in Chapter 10 states:

Lake Chad: Tragedy of the Floodplains

The death of a wetland is a terrible thing, particularly a wetland in a desert. When it happens, lakes shrivel, crops go brown in the baking sun, fishing nets empty, trees dies, and herders slaughter their animals for whatever pitiful amount of cash they can raise. The land curls up and dies. The people depart. Usually this happens when the rains fail. How much more terrible when a drought is manmade-when a wetland dies because

¹ Ken Midkiff, *Not a Drop to Drink: America's Water Crisis* 2007.

² Fred Pearce, *When the Rivers Run Dry: Water-The Defining Crisis of the Twenty-First Century* 2006.

humans have decided to divert rivers that should replenish it; when the water is taken for little purpose, as a statement of power of one community over another; and when even hard-nosed economists say that what is going on is madness.

Welcome, then, to the death of the Hadejia-Ngurur wetland in northern Nigeria. [...] The wetland supported a million or more people and provided exports of fish and vegetables to cities across the largest country in Africa. Some of it remains. But much has been destroyed as dams divert rivers upstream for irrigation projects, the lakes shrink, and the summer flood dries up. [...] The government promised that the dams and irrigation works would turn the landscape green and create bounty. But they have been done the opposite. They have been destroying a natural bounty of far greater value.

[...] Since the completion of the dams, the water has come down the rivers onto the wetland has often caused mayhem. It has come at the wrong time, fed the wrong channels, and caused damaging floods rather than nurturing the ecosystems.

[...] Occasionally there are bigger floods, when, after very heavy rains, dam managers hurriedly release water downstream to protect their structures.

And finally 'One of the ironies is that we have grown disturbingly good at disrupting river flows while losing our capacity for coping with, let alone prospering from, the consequences.'³

Then there are other examples such as China's Yellow River.

Equally clearly, rivers in these desiccated regions are also being emptied by direct human activity, often to irrigate fields parched by the lack of rain. [Other examples are the reduced flows in Rio Grande, rivers feeding Lake Chad, and other rivers of Central Asia]

But, as climate change gathers pace in the coming decades, [remember this book was published in 2006!] desiccation won't be universal. [...] the one certainty is that change is taking place quite rapidly on many rivers, and the hydrological statistics on which dam builders, river managers, and irrigation districts rely to build their structures and make their plans often have little meaning anymore.⁴

It is clear that the Murray Darling Basin Authority must ensure that there is a balance with water being returned to the environment. If you read what the Victorian EDO has written about the Victorian Water Act and environmental water then it is clear that water for the environment does not have security and is always the first to be stopped because the government has not assessed the impacts on taking it for human use.

I ask that the Authority makes certain that the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan makes certain that the environment receives its fair share of water and that this share is not taken every time we have a drought just because the environment is silent! States have a vested interest in growing population and activities such as mining, industry, forestry and farming; all of which contribute taxes to their coffers. The ineffectual Environmental Effects Act of Victoria is just one example of how impacts are not assessed in a rigorous manner with Minister making decisions without a proper referral, without public consultation and without any oversight. The laws do not appear to protect in regard to the environment and this means that our natural environment will decline and vanish with little or no regard for the rights of future generations much less those that are living today.

A perfect example is the ridiculous North South pipeline that proposed to remove water FOREVER from the already ailing Murray Darling Basin, attaching more than 5 million people to it! As I pointed out at each session I attended; the totally unacceptable error on page 15 of the Guide where Adelaide is erroneously said to be the largest city outside the Basin

³ Ibid 87.

⁴ Ibid 123.

reliant on the water of the MDB underlines the importance of getting the MDB Plan completely right.

The amount of information, in books, journals, internet, and many other sources is impressive. For the Authority to ensure that the Plan does get the balance right they can always ask me to give them my list of suggested reading materials as I believe that the socio, economic and environmental concerns have all been noted and partly investigated.

It is now time to collate all the information and to make the hard decisions ensuring that we do not let OUR 'rivers run dry'.

Apologies, I have run out of time but will be submitting to the proposed MDB Plan when it is released and I hope that even then you will take note of all concerns without ANY political shenanigans!!!

Thank you and please do not hesitate to ask me anything.

Maria I E Riedl



We plugged the North South pipeline by helping change the government who refused to listen and refused to investigate OTHER more logical options for Melbourne's water supply. November 2010. Community consultation was non-existent, information was non-existent and we had NO recourse to environmental justice. This is what happens when politicians play politics and ignore democracy.



No, not a house but the **pump shed** on the Heritage listed Goulburn River for the North South pipeline in disguise! Nov 2010



The intake on the Goulburn River for Melbourne and its North South pipeline-just in front of the house that is the pump shed! Photos by Maria Riedl November 2010.



The Mighty Murray River at Nangiloc in Victoria 2008



Irrigation from the Murrumbidgee River 30kms from Hay NSW 2008



The irrigation area 30kms from Hay NSW-from the Murrumbidgee River 2008



The Murrumbidgee River at Hay 2008



Submission No. 535: Maria I E Reid

Titles of Attachments to Submission 535 as follows:

- Ecological Sustainable Development
- A hundred years of negotiations with no end in sight: Where is the Murray Darling Basin Initiative leading us?
- The Social Impact of Changing Water Regimes – Framework and Echuca Case Study (November 2005)
- Report4: Exploring the Relationship Between Community Resilience and Irrigated Agriculture in the MDB: Social and Economic Impacts of Reduced Irrigation Water (July 2010)
- Infrastructure Australia – Review of Urban Water Security Strategies (May 2010)
- Statistics relating to the North South Pipeline which highlight the Victorian State Government’s Failure on Water (September 19, 2010)
- Department of Industry, Innovation and Regional Development: Economic assessment of water infrastructure – Final Report – The impact of the construction and maintenance of the Food Bowl Modernisation and the Sugarloaf Pipeline projects (December 2007)
- 2009-2010 Irrigation Status Report: Pumped Irrigation Districts (June 2010)
- Article from Maude Barlow – “Our Commons Future is Already Here” (October 12, 2010)
- Article from Poh-Ling Tan – “Diving into the deep: Water markets and the law” (Inland Rivers Regulators Strategies for Ecologically Sustainable Management, Sydney, EDO, 1994)
- Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment: Powerpoint slides by Campbell Fitzpatrick, DSE. (18 August 2009)
- Article from William L Andreen: “The evolving contours of water law in the United States: Bridging the gap between water rights, land use and the protection of the aquatic environment”
- Newspaper articles from the Sunday Sun Herald, 24 October 2010: “The Great Water Debate”