

## SUBMISSION TO

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# THE INQUIRY INTO THE WATER AMENDMENT (SAVING THE GOULBURN AND MURRAY RIVERS) BILL 2008

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JANUARY 30, 2009

MARIA I E RIEDL

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The once mighty Murray River at Nangiloc, Victoria (near Mildura) April 2007

I, Maria I E Riedl, would like to express my total unequivocal support for the Water Amendment (Saving the Goulburn and Murray Rivers) Bill 2008 and I sincerely request and actually beg on my knees that you the Senate, put aside politics and for once consider what is at stake: the Goulburn River and the Murray River. There is absolutely no doubt that without this Amendment these two rivers in the Murray-Darling Basin are condemned to a slow and tortuous death by a thousand illogically and politically endorsed deep final death cuts; from both the Victorian and New South Wales governments with the complicity of the Commonwealth government. There must be robust and fair consideration of the National Water Commission's (NWC) mission: to ensure that these and the others rivers in the already over-allocation and endangered Murray-Darling Basin have a return of secure environmental

flows and that the over allocations are addressed. It is not acceptable to continue along the 'business-as-usual' path which is apparently what vested interested State's want and do.

It is totally unacceptable, illogical, selfish, and environmentally unsustainable and politically motivated taking water out of the driest and most endangered and predicted ever diminishing Basin in Australia. The Brumby government's proposal to remove 75GL (minimum) via a 1750mm (over 6 foot), 70 kilometer pipeline cutting a 30 meter swathe of devastation through private property and State Forest and wetlands from the worst river (according to the CSIRO report) into another Basin, when the proposal was done without robust long term commitment to recycling and harvesting storm water is shameful and borders on environmental terrorism.

I'd like to stress that it is obvious to every Tom, Dick and Harry (perhaps not governments that have unacceptably damaging politically driven agendas) that separating groundwater and surface water is not possible as groundwater runs into our rivers and the two are intrinsically and intricately tied together. The reason I mention this is that the upgrades to infrastructures in these systems has not taken into account the fact that a portion of the seepages would go into groundwater and into our rivers. This has NOT been scientifically investigated and put out there for the community to scrutinize.

Again, I ask that you look at the both the NWC and the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council (MDBMC) intentions which clearly state that in the very first instance government's must recycle and harvest storm water and then look at other options. It is self evident that Victoria has not done this, they have instead decided on the most environmentally degrading options to ensure Melbourne and Geelong's water supplies: the North-South pipeline and the 200GL desalination plant near Wonthaggi (the largest in the world) as first options. This is reprehensible and totally ridiculous, as both these options use unbelievably more energy to deliver water, which has a known impressive weight. The construction of these two massive infrastructures is not offset and produces tons and tons of greenhouse gases ensuring that Victoria is the worst of all State's in Australia in regards emissions.

The water that is used to suppress the dust during construction of the pipeline is taken from the already stressed Yarra River whose environmental flows have been cut by this government so the metropolitan areas, unlike the rest of Victoria, did not have to go to Stage 4 restrictions. One can only surmise that the massive amount of trucks taking water for dust suppression merrily emit uncalculated greenhouse gases and take precious water that will not be calculated and accounted for. This is unacceptable, ridiculous, bordering on criminal actions and indicates that the Victorian government is quite happy to take environmental water without an EES to assess the short and long-term consequences for this already over allocated, unregulated, endangered river.

The Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability in his damning (late) 2008 report of the State of the Environment; a report of the Victorian government's environmental credentials quite clearly states the following points:

- The argument to keep action at a nominal level is a decision to accept the consequences of climate change.
- This State of the Environment Report reflects the simple fact that most areas of the state are highly stressed. Most natural vegetation, waterways, wetlands, coastal and rivers are reported in a parlous condition.
- Victoria has more than 50 Acts and nearly 30 Strategies that relate to environmental management, (not including legislation and the large budget programmes of the Commonwealth), yet this report shows that at best these are holding the line on environmental degradation, and at worst they have only slowed the rate of decline or made no difference. While there have been some excellent recent initiatives in 'joined-up governance, the value of partnerships between agencies is not sufficiently widely accepted to really address the scale and inter-relatedness of environmental problems.
- The city [Melbourne] can never be ignored in any assessment of Victoria.
- But the dichotomy in the state of Victoria's natural environment is also expressed in a deeply divided approach to policy. On the one hand the drive for economic growth and population increase has led to policy responses that emphasise the present and inertia of past practice. In reinforcing present patterns of development we continue to externalise environmental degradation and costs not just to the future but increasingly to the recognisable present.

- While the inertia of the present, accompanied by short electoral cycles, seems to force a confirmation of historical paths, the demands of the near future require a more sophisticated resolution.
- There is a substantial range of decisions taken by government that have unexpected and unconsidered environmental consequences and impose further stress on natural systems. Many of these are promoted by departments and agencies that simply do not see the connection.
- Government at the centre must accept that natural systems are the basis of the economy. Therefore at the centre, Government should be adept at ensuring that decision do no unknowingly reduce the value of the natural systems and therefore devalue the State.

These statements in the foreword of his report clearly enforce my assertion that this government has not done a rigorous assessment of the water projects. It is rushing ahead using the drought and climate change as an excuse to ignore proper and thorough environmental assessments, in this submissions context; taking water from a dry Basin without due diligence, without rigorous and inclusive community consultation and without doing the savings first. There is no doubt that this extraction from the Heritage listed Goulburn River (one Bulk Entitlement) and from the Murray River (the second Bulk Entitlement) will be disastrous.

This proposed Amendment ensures that this does not happen. It is up to you the Senate, acting on our behalf for the Commonwealth of Australia for all Australia past, present and future generations enshrining in legislation that cannot be misinterpreted in the form of this Amendment which states that:

- Water for Rivers must achieve significant improvements in environmental flows into the Snowy River and the Murray River (without interference from States that are signatory to the Living Murray Initiative and the Snowy Initiative, for selfish political reasons-though they would claim otherwise!)
- That until the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia have each achieved the objectives of increasing the flow of water in the River Murray as required by the Living Murray Initiative and that their water savings are independently audited and the saved water immediately available and must not be used for any other purpose.
- That the Basin Plan is to prohibit taking water for additional uses outside the Basin (unless prior to 3 July 2008 when the CoAG agreement was signed by these states, and QLD and ACT).
- The Basin Plan must not permit construction or operation of water infrastructure or work to control river flow and this must not be done contrary to the previous two clauses.
- The exception is water for Water for Rivers (again prohibiting taking from the MDB to another basin) and Snowy River environmental flows.
- No water infrastructure and river flow control enabling to take water from Basin Water resources for use outside the Murray-Darling Basin (unless water would have been taken prior to 3 July 2008).

It is obvious that this would stop any further extractions removing water forever from the Murray-Darling Basin. I say to you that this is the only option to stop further over allocations, further use of such terms as “critical human needs” and drought and climate change as an excuse to proceed with projects that do not benefit the worst Basin in Australia. The infrastructure upgrades should be done in the north of the state without blackmail and holding irrigators and towns along these rivers to ransom so that Melbourne can flush the Heritage listed Goulburn and the once mighty River Murray out at Gunnamatta in Melbourne.

This is water is forever and ever removed from the Murray-Darling Basin, taken forever and ever from the Heritage listed and worst river in this basin; the Goulburn River and the once mighty River Murray which services not only the ecosystems along and in it but communities all the way from its mouth to Adelaide in South Australia. These rivers are over allocated, any saved water must stay in these rivers, and there can be no question about this. This is the duty of Victoria, of South Australia and of New South Wales. They are signatories to the 3 July CoAG agreement; they have their own legislation that is there to protect these rivers. Victoria has actually got the Heritage Rivers Act that is meant to stop any further extraction from the Goulburn River which is specifically listed in this Act. There are issues such as lack of any robust EES, lack of scientific evidence, lack of completed studies, lack of meaningful community consultation (the Project Impact Assessment for the Sugarloaf pipeline was down not by a panel who had the power to look at the water savings, not by panel who had the

ability to say 'no', not by a panel who should have stopped the obscenely short 7 day wonder of a hearing but by a panel that was biased, that was chosen to solely align the pipeline because it was a done deal. Criminal and unacceptable and I would like to draw your attention to the fact that this pipeline is being rushed at such a whopping great rate. They are prepared to bulldoze 30 metre swathe of State forest without studies done in an appropriate time frame and scale. Without an full EES, without due process, without adhering to; 'duty of care', 'public trust', 'human rights', comprehensive community consultation, a social impact statement, ignoring the Precautionary Principal, ignoring Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) and hamstringing the EPBC Act.

You have an opportunity to put politics aside and pass this Amendment, perhaps even strengthen it, and save these two rivers which are major rivers in the Murray-Darling Basin. The Goulburn River is a tributary to the River Murray. The PIA states that there will be two Bulk Entitlements; one from the Goulburn River and one from the River Murray. Surely this will effect downstream wetlands whether they are Ramsar listed or not, downstream aquatic life, downstream red gums that line these rivers and depend upon them for their survival.

You must realise that these aquatic creatures cannot move, the trees cannot move, some people cannot move because they rely upon these rivers. Melbourne has other unexplored options that are yet to be explored, they have more environmentally sustainable and friendly solutions to their water woes. Are you prepared to vote along political lines (Labor and Labor!) and make a decision that is convenient, easy and expected by the present governments? Or are you of a mind to say enough is enough, we must vote to pass this Amendment (and strengthen it) so that future generations can point to this generation of politicians and commend them for their vision, commend them for their bi partisanship.

I have written so many things on this that I will send them as attachments and also send other information that I have found in my research so that when you vote, you vote with awareness, with a knowledge that the only option, the only sensible option, the only acceptable option is a resounding "Yes" passing this Amendment. States that are signatory to the CoAG agreement 3 July 2008 must adhere to what they have signed up to, they must adhere to the Commonwealth Water Act 2007, they must adhere to the MDBMC and NWC and Ramsar Convention and other International agreements that Australia is signatory to. You cannot pass the buck any longer.

I live on the River Murray near Mildura and I can tell you that travelling at night on the river there is absolutely no flow and it is getting worse as the heat wave which is here will decimate further the red gums, the wetlands, the environment, the crops and communities that live along our rivers. It is immoral to take water from the worst Basin in Australia to another Basin at a time when this Basin is predicted to get drier and climate change will affect it more so than anywhere else int he entire world. Just look at the reports I am including and with all conscience you must pass this bill.

I will personally hold you responsible if you use politics and profit and other excuses to water this Amendment down or cross any part of it off in an attempt to placate governments that are continuing along a 'business-as-usual' path and that is considering the Goulburn and Murray Rivers as 'work horses'. Their jobs being to provide water for cities that cannot be bothered to recycle, harvest run off storm water, cut down usage and cut down on population growth (instead of encouraging it, as does the Victorian government by merrily predicting that Melbourne's population will expand from 3 million to 5 million and this is why they need the pipeline and the largest desalination plant in the world. What will happen when there is the 5 million encouraged growth (competition with Sydney), will there be more pipelines, and will there be another enormous desalination plant? Will the Essential Services Commission keep saying that recycling and storm water harvesting is not possible because water for the city would be too dear and this is an unacceptable burden? This is what they have said in their latest report. They say that once these two huge (energy guzzling, environmentally degrading) infrastructures are factored into Melbournians water bills, they will not be allowed to upgrade so that recycling and storm water harvesting of over 300GL of water which flows out at the outfall at Gunnamatta is not simply not just wasted flowing out to sea, but also poisons where it outflows.

The black balloon ads on late night television are offensive because the Victorian government is asking us to cut our energy consumption and at the same time proposes to build another coal fired power station. (Calling it clean coal technology-hasn't been done yet! Compare it to lack of completed audit of the water savings for the pipeline!) They are building two projects and not offsetting the greenhouse gas emissions from these two projects. They are projects that produce massive amounts of greenhouse gas emissions when operating, this is unacceptable yet again. Disgusting!

You have it in your power to say that the Goulburn and Murray Rivers are a vital part of the Murray-Darling Basin and that they must be protected immediately and that the best way is by passing this Amendment.

I am sending attachments that I believe are pertinent to your decision, there are many well documented, well researched reports that have been commissioned by various governments that you must take into consideration. I request that you please read them and understand that this is the one and only opportunity you have to ensure the survival of the Goulburn and Murray Rivers and I ask that you take it upon yourselves to do so without regard and favour.

And I repeat that Melbourne has other options.

I reiterate that the Heritage listed Goulburn River and the River Murray has no other options as the inflows are projected to be even less due to not only the existing over allocations, not only the drought, not only climate change but due to regrowth from the 2003 and 2006 fires in the Alpine areas, which are the catchment areas for these rivers. This regrowth has not been factored into the proposed extraction that removes forever water from the Murray-Darling Basin to another Basin. This is forever and ever Senators. The continual cutting of environmental flows by governments such as the flows to the Yarra River and others is not acceptable and according to the NWC and the MDBMC and according to the Victorian Commission for Environmental Sustainability, this must not happen:

In the past four years, over 75% of the total flow was harvested for consumptive use from a quarter of Victoria's river basins. During times of low stream flows, the water allocation system reduces environmental flows more than it reduces water for consumptive use.

In over half the river basins in Victoria, less than 20% of rivers have flow regimes in good condition. Changes to low flow events are most widespread, resulting in a number of pressures from changed breeding and spawning conditions to poor water quality.

Due to river regulation and over extraction compounded by drought, many tens of thousands of hectares of River Red Gum forests and wetlands in northern Victoria are highly stressed. Without adequate flooding in the near future they may be lost, requiring centuries to recover.

Water availability will be cumulatively reduced by climate change and catchment processes such as forests regenerating after bushfires; the legacy of historic groundwater extraction; small unlicensed domestic and stock farm dams; and plantation forests.

In many rivers and aquifers the current environmental water reserve (EWR) is inadequate and vulnerable, placing environmental values at risk.

Some of the commissioner's key recommendations:

IW1.1 Address the disproportionate reduction in water remaining in basins during times of low streamflow, which results from the current system of bulk entitlements defined as a volumetric share of the resource.

IW1.2 Provide environmental water requirements for groundwater-dependent ecosystems once the delivery method has been finalised.

IW1.5 Disclose the reasons for, and likely environmental, social and economic impacts of the qualification of environmental flows, as decisions are made.

IW1.6 Act with urgency to increase environmental water reserves where they are currently insufficient to keep rivers in a sustainable condition, including buying back water. In particular, minor and moderate flooding events should be restored to floodplain ecosystems.

IW1.8 Adopt a new term for environmental flows that does not have the connotations of being ‘just for the environment, and expresses the importance of maintaining water quality and river health. For example, “essential baseflow” could be used to describe minimum flows required during low-flow periods to maintain water quality and river health.

IW1.9 Improve the awareness and understanding within the community of the importance of environmental flows for inland water, and provide regular consolidated reports on progress against the actions and outcomes within *Our Water Our Future* and the regional sustainable water strategies.

The Commissioner also states the following which I whole heartedly endorse as brilliant:

- The wellbeing of Victorians is ultimately dependent upon the health of the natural environment. The ecosystems services upon which we depend have been, and under business-as-usual scenarios will continue to be, compromised.
- While it is essential to ensure that *future* development is within sustainable limits, Victorian society is unsustainable now. Refocusing on current patterns is necessary and possible through use of the term *ecologically sustainable use* (ESU). ESU is applied in this discussion to make the point that present uses affect the state of the environment as much as do growth and change.
- In the context of the scale of the challenge, environmental governance is disparate and inconsistent. The current nature of environmental challenges means that governance must become strategic and future-focused. The technique of *strategic environmental assessment* should be used to address the long-term and wider implications of planning and policy.

Also:

LW1 The Victorian Government develop and use a single robust and clearly defined vision of an environmentally sustainable Victoria, incorporating environmentally sustainable use of natural resources, and use this to develop an update to Growing Victoria.

LW5 When considering ecologically sustainable development, the Victorian Government should take into account the present and short-term (as well as longer term) impacts of the development process and use all available development opportunities to achieve reductions in absolute environmental pressures.

LW9 That the Victorian Government, wherever possible, prevent the perpetuation of shifting baselines, particularly in regard to natural systems for which the crossing of thresholds are known and would constitute ecosystem collapse.

LW15 An examination of current policy should be made by the Victorian Government to identify and reconcile subsidies, grants and programs that are perverse to agreed environmental objectives. [the pipeline and the desalination plant]

Commissioner Ian McPhail, SoE Victoria 2008 Report.

I would wholly recommend you read the commissioner’s entire report because it carries no favours and basically says it as it is. The Government has 12 months to respond to the report

Please vote wisely and pass this amendment to the Water Act 2007.

I will forward a list of attachments later today so you have a clearer picture of what I think is important and supports my request.

Kindest regards

Maria I E Riedl