

# Deb Foskey MLA

## Member for Molonglo

The Secretary  
Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee (Senate)  
Parliament House  
Canberra

9<sup>th</sup> August 2007

Dear Chair

Please find enclosed a document that was prepared by two workshops over a period of three months by Greens members living in the Murray Darling Basin.

Given the short amount of time given for this important inquiry – in my opinion, a breach of democratic principles and a reduction in the real value that committee work can bring to issues – the Greens have not been able to prepare a formal submission. Nor, at such short notice, am I able to appear as a witness.

Some important issues in our action plan which I would like the committee to consider are:

- involving traditional owners in decisions and management of the Basin;
- ensuring community expertise is maximised in Catchment Management Authorities;
- establishing a community advisory committee to ensure that all decisions have social as well as ecological and economic impacts considered; and
- ensuring that the rivers, wetlands and flood plains are restored as near as possible to full ecological health.

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I look forward to the committee's report – it is true that the time to act is now but it is equally important that that action be considered, advised by experts and the community, and performed for the health of our society and environment.

Yours faithfully

Deb Foskey

(a hard copy will be delivered by hand today)



# Kooma Green School and Albury-Wodonga Statement Murray Darling Basin Water and Environment Action Plan July 2007

We aim to restore the health of the Murray Darling Basin so that the Darling again flows to the Murray and the Murray to the sea.

To achieve this we need to:

- (a) acknowledge the unique status of the Indigenous Nations in the Basin and their traditional connections to lands, waters and natural resources, under their own laws, customs and practices;
- (b) unify the governance of all water resources, in-stream, groundwater and artesian, in a context of Integrated Catchment Management;
- (c) recognise the threat of climate change to the MDB and set in place measures to mitigate against its impacts and make the Basin a carbon sink rather than carbon emitter
- (d) restore water volumes and flow patterns adequate to sustain rivers, wetlands and floodplains as healthy functioning ecosystems;
- (e) develop the ecological services economy of the Basin;
- (f) assist the move to ecologically sustainable agricultural production, regional economies and communities.

The Commonwealth Government's \$10 billion *National Plan for Water Security* aims to improve water efficiency and address over-allocation of water in rural Australia. For the first time, this gives one body – the Commonwealth<sup>1</sup> – the clear responsibility for water management in the Murray Darling Basin. Little regard is given to the unique status of the traditional owners of the Basin or the necessity to reinstate environmental flows to restore river health.

This *Statement* is a collection of ideas and initiatives from discussions at the Kooma Green School<sup>2</sup> and additions from discussions at the Water Policy Working Group meeting of N.S.W., ACT and Victorian Greens at Albury/Wodonga.<sup>3</sup>

## Actions

- 1 Establish proper processes for engagement and consultation with Traditional Owner groups in planning for the Murray Darling Basin
- 2 Lower the 1995 Cap in line with C.S.I.R.O. climate change predictions for decreased inflows

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<sup>1</sup> The Commonwealth also has direct legislative responsibility for threatened species and internationally significant Ramsar wetlands through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*. As well it is a substantial funder of land and water management through the Natural Heritage Trust and other programs, in addition to the proposed \$10 billion over 10 years.

<sup>2</sup> The Kooma Green School was held from 25-27 May 2007 at Murra Murra on the banks of Nebine Creek, the traditional lands of the Kooma people. It was organised by the Green Institute and the Kooma Traditional Owners Association.

<sup>3</sup> The Water Policy Working Group of the Victorian Greens, together with N.S.W. and A.C.T. Greens involved with the national water policy, met at Wodonga on 21-22 July, 2007.

## Restore water

- 3 Buy back water and water rights for the environment and Indigenous cultural values. (The buy-back should begin immediately with \$280 million for the Macquarie Marshes. OR Allocate at least \$3 billion and begin immediately with \$280 million (established in the N.S.W. Riverbank Scheme) for specific Ramsar sites such as the Macquarie Marshes, and the return of their ecological services.)
- 4 Invest in improved water system efficiency and where water is saved through public investment return 100% of the savings to the environment
- 5 Return 20% of water traded to the environment, as is currently required in Victoria. Require plantations established primarily for commercial wood production to pay for the water they consume.
- 7 Restore catchments and riparian zones with appropriate local species

## Prevent further degradation

- 6 Place a moratorium on new licences on surface or ground water until up to date ecologically sustainable flow limits are robustly and scientifically determined, taking into account climate change and the precautionary principle.
- 7 Cap the amount of water that can be traded out of a catchment, ensuring water supply for regional towns and cities.
- 8 Recognise that irrigation will have to cease in some water intensive industries, and some areas, and develop structural adjustment packages for the transition.
- 9 Abandon the weir proposed for Wellington on the lower Murray River.<sup>4</sup>
- 10 Halt land clearing and draining of wetlands throughout the Basin.
- 11 Permanently protect the red gum icon forests of the Murray Valley, with joint management were appropriate. Place a moratorium on commercial logging of floodplain forests throughout the Basin until flows are adequate to ensure regeneration and a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system is established.<sup>5</sup>
- 12 Protect Cooper Creek,<sup>6</sup> the Paroo, and Nebine Creek from irrigation development.
- 13 Suspend completion of the Condamine Balonne Resource Operations Plan, which covers Cubbie Station and a number of similar huge on-farm dams, until the impacts on downstream wetlands, including the Ramsar listed Narran Lakes, and the Darling River are assessed.
- 15 Extend research, mapping, monitoring and rehabilitation of all wetlands, riparian zones, ephemeral flows and aquifers in consultation with local Indigenous and environmental groups and communities.

## Stop water profiteering

- 16 Cap the amount of water which can be owned by a single entity within each catchment and Basin-wide.
- 17 Disallow the owning of sales water rights
- 18 Place a moratorium on the conversion of non-compensable water authorisations to compensable forms of water allocation until sustainable flow limits are determined
- 19 Prevent water stealing such as through unregulated diversions and the interception of environmental flows.
- 20 Ensure all bores and pumps from water resources are metered and monitored

## Enable Basin-wide governance

- 21 Legislate such that the primary responsibility of the proposed Murray Darling Basin Authority is to specify and, over time, achieve, ecologically sustainable flows in all Basin water systems, taking into account climate change and the precautionary principle. Members of the Authority should have specified expertise, including

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<sup>5</sup> It was felt the recent V.E.A.C. Report should be endorsed but expanded in line with this point.

<sup>6</sup> The Cooper system is not strictly part of the MDB but shares similar issues and threats.

ecological, and should include Indigenous representation. Water trading should be managed by a separate agency.

22 Establish a Community Advisory Committee representing stakeholder groups with a separate secretariat to advise the Ministerial Council and Authority on social, environmental and economic issues at local and regional levels

23 Catchment Management Authorities (C.M.A.'s) should be empowered to implement the water and land policies of the Murray Darling Basin Authority, including administering water distribution.

24 Establish a well-funded independent Murray Darling Basin Information Bureau, responsible for research, collection and publication of Basin-wide environmental, scientific, social and economic information. Require the Bureau to undertake audits and table regular 'State of the Basin' reports in all Basin parliaments.

25 Support self-determined arrangements for Indigenous governance in the Basin, including by providing funding and other resources.

26 Develop Basin-wide structures for community engagement and consultation

### Develop ecological services and social sustainability

27 Recognise the vital role of the Basin in providing ecological services, including clean water, biodiversity, carbon storage and renewable energy, and develop economic strengths based on these.

28 Over time, remove inappropriate activities, rehabilitate degraded land and implement *ecologically* sustainable practices for growing food and fibre in the Basin.

29 Ensure that all those who live in the Basin have good access to essential services, provided as locally as possible, and the opportunity to be part of a cohesive, enriching society.