

## **The implications for the long-term sustainable management of the Murray Darling Basin system with particular reference to ...**

### ***a. The adequacy of current whole-of-basin governance arrangements under the Intergovernmental Agreement;***

- There needs to be a weir at Wellington or a pipeline from Lock 1 to provide to water in dry years to the lower reaches.
- The use of water is well below optimal because of losses that arise from the water sharing agreement. In dry years water losses are minimised if the water is used closest to the storages. Drying out the channel, as would naturally occur in a drought, minimises channel losses and evaporation.
- If the total amount of water available for irrigation is permanently reduced, then the communities that depend on it will be reduced as well.

### ***b. The adequacy of current arrangements in relation to the implementation of the Basin Plan and water sharing arrangements;***

- The existing system of management is built on the allocation of water available during a wet phase. It includes political trade-offs particularly the South Australian Entitlement that do not respect the natural flows nor represent an economically sound allocation of water available in dry years.
- The river is a desert river it has always stopped flowing during drought.
- The ecosystem is adapted to drought and drought is healthy for the river and its associated ecosystems.
- The river now has an extensive native biomass that has adapted to depend on irrigation. This has considerable ecological value and must be taken into account when altering the balance between irrigation and ecological flows.
- The flow between the Coorong and the sea has been partly reduced by irrigation diversion coupled with drought condition, however the main reduction to flows into the southern Coorong has been reduction of the available flows.

from reclaiming farmland in the lower lakes area.

Note: The barrages reduce the flow to and from the sea to a far greater extent than the reduction in river flows caused by irrigation.

***c. long-term prospects for the management of Ramsar wetlands including the supply of adequate environmental flows;***

- The river management system needs to reproduce what would be the naturally occurring flow extremes and utilize a proportion of the "normal" flow, as irrigation use tends to manipulate rather than reduce that flow over much of the river's length.
- The ecosystem needs to be allowed to adapt to the current climatic conditions. ie: drought and flood.
- "Environmental Flows" are not maintaining the ecosystem they are interfering with and impeding the natural process of adaptation that the ecosystem must make to any drought sequence.
- To maintain a natural ecosystem environmental flows should be maximized in wet years and irrigation flows maximized in dry years.
- Environmental flows may be doing as much damage as good by destabilising the drought response in the river ecosystem.

***d. the risks to the basin posed by unregulated water interception activities and water theft;***

- Wastage through politically determined sharing arrangements, unsound "environmental flows", open channel supply of stock and domestic water, and excessively "wettered area" within the river flood plain are likely to result in much more water loss than water theft.

***e. the ability of the Commonwealth to bind state and territory governments to meet their obligations under the National Water Initiative;***

- *The whole river needs to be managed as a national resource for the maximum economic and environmental benefit of the nation not of individual states. The threats to the river and the river dependent economy is political as well as climatic. Only if we recognise that the lower lakes were estuarine and NOT naturally fresh, and their future management must be discussed.*

***f. the adequacy of existing state and territory water and natural resource management legislation and enforcement arrangements;***

- *A major concern is the real risk of having thrown the baby out with the bathwater in the establishment of the Murray Darling Authority to replace the Murray Darling Basin Commission.*

The one issue with the Murray Darling Basin Commission was the veto power that any state could exercise to stop any action that they deemed adverse to their interests.

It was misused by South Australia at the time of the negotiation for the construction of Dartmouth Dam. South Australia pushed for 2 dam constructions at the same time Dartmouth and Chowilla in South Australia. The upper states and Federal Government and even South Australia knew that Chowilla was not a good option.

- However to get South Australia to agree to drop the Chowilla Dam, they negotiated a change to the water sharing agreement.

From previously 3/13 South Australia and 5/13 New South Wales and 5/13 Victoria to effectively equal share but South Australia's share being guaranteed (and the upper states sharing the remainder).

This has devastated the upper states in this drought sequence where NSW has had approximately 1/2 and Victoria 2/3 of the water that has been delivered to South Australia across the border.

We believe the states need some ability to protect their individual state interests without having a bloody minded ability to prevent development; perhaps the veto could have been replaced by a majority vote of all Murray Darling Basin States and the Commonwealth.

The current Murray Darling Association structure is too weighted to Federal control.

***g. the impacts of climate change on the likely future availability of water***

- If there is Climate change this will reduce the snow pack and inflows. It may also result in greater variability around a general drying trend.
- Evaporation rates will increase.
- If Climate change is a fact then increased soil erosion and risk of fire could affect catchment performance
- There needs to be an increased storage of water ie: that is an environmental reservoir/s need to be constructed as a matter of urgency with or without Climate change due to the fact of the emerging food shortage in Australia, thus dearer food costs to the population.

Murray Darling (Basin) Water Crisis Management Council





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## **Inquiry into the implications for the long-term sustainable management of the Murray Darling Basin system**

### **Terms of reference**

The implications for the long-term sustainable management of the Murray Darling Basin system for inquiry and the **reporting date has been extended to 19 March 2009**, with particular reference to:

- a. the adequacy of current whole-of-basin governance arrangements under the Intergovernmental Agreement;
- b. the adequacy of current arrangements in relation to the implementation of the Basin Plan and water sharing arrangements;
- c. long-term prospects for the management of Ramsar wetlands including the supply of adequate environmental flows;
- d. the risks to the basin posed by unregulated water interception activities and water theft;
- e. the ability of the Commonwealth to bind state and territory governments to meet their obligations under the National Water Initiative;
- f. the adequacy of existing state and territory water and natural resource management legislation and enforcement arrangements; and