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Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport
The Management of the Murray-Darling Basin
Chairman Senator Heffernan **by email: rat.sen@aph.gov.au**

Dear Senator Heffernan,

We wish to make the following Submission on the Draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Our family are irrigators on family owned farms operating in the Lower Balonne at "Wynella" Dirranbandi, in the Gwydir at "Deer Park" and "Glenbar" at Moree, and in the Namoi at "Woodvale" at Wee Waa. Seven family members are involved full time on these farms and another seven grandchildren have every right to expect that they can come back to the family farms to continue farming in the traditions of their ancestors who have been farming in Australia since the 1840's.

As well as family members we also employ 10 permanent staff and have 2 casual backpackers also helping out. Other casual and contract labour is utilised to ensure the work is kept up to date.

At the moment there are fourteen families dependant on employment with the Pechelba Trust group, and as we shop locally as much as we can, there is a significant flow on effect for the towns of Moree, Dirranbandi, Wee Waa and Narrabri. There are fourteen children of Pechelba employees either attending school or pre school, and using the medical and other services provided in our local towns.

All have been put under immense stress since the release of the Draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

They all know that without water we will be unable to guarantee them employment, and that if they do lose their employment it will mean shifting out of the irrigation areas and moving God know's where to try and support their families in a strange area, where they don't know anyone, and will not be able to perform the work they have been trained to do.

From the Cush families' perspective – we have even more stress to cope with. Not only do we feel very much for our employees, but we must meet our commitments to the bank on loans that were put in place years ago to service expansion into irrigation that would provide for the future needs of our families. It is just not possible to service these debts without being able to use the full capacity of the water we have purchased.

We also have to face the fact that our grandchildren who have worked very hard after school, through holidays, at weekends – all in the knowledge that they were learning to be farmers and would when their school was finished, come back and take their place on the family farms, now will have to be told that their future has been flushed down the Darling to evaporate in the Lower Lakes.

Specifically in the Gwydir we object most strenuously, on the following grounds:

1. Despite the fact that the plan is meant to be based on the "Best Available Science", the science is extremely flawed as evidenced by the fact that the "Guide" shows that the Gwydir had greater proportion of its natural inflows outflow from the end of the system than the Border Rivers – How can this be when the Gwydir has a terminal wetland?

2. The Gwydir, through its Water Sharing Plan, is already operating at 9% below Cap, and the current water sharing plans have not been able to demonstrate their true value as they have only run through a dry cycle. Now the seasons appeared to have turned, they should be allowed the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to meet environmental needs before further cuts are contemplated.

3. The "Guide" grossly overestimates the environmental water needs of the Gwydir Wetlands, primarily because it shows the Wetlands extending over 70000 ha's instead of the 10000 ha's that they actually cover.

4. The "Guide" completely fails to identify the true socio-economic impacts that it would have if implemented. The Moree community knows the "drought" has cost it 2000 jobs alone, and the "Plan" by its own admission will put in place a permanent "drought" economy.

5. The Moree community can have no faith in the "Guide" because even its authors cannot clearly explain its content nor its implications.

6. While it is right that the Government should purchase or fund through efficiency works any water it requires; 1. no sound case for further water purchase has been made and 2. there has been no consideration as to how communities can be compensated.

There are many instances of Government inspired policies proving to be an absolute waste of money, and in the case of the pink batts – even costing lives. If this shambles of a Draft Basin Plan is allowed to continue I fear there will be much more blood on the Government's hands. People are at the end of their tether after years of drought, low prices, high input costs and high debt. Now

just as we seem to have a turn in the weather, we have a Government come along and want to take the only means we have, to claw back. Not only are we unlikely to meet our commitments without our full complement of water, our communities will be shattered. Beyond Blue will be run off its feet.

The Water Sharing Plans must be allowed time to work. These were put in place to serve our individual valleys, and were very generous with water for the environment. The Green vote cannot be allowed to devastate the farming communities in the Murray-Darling Basin.

I understand that the Government has purchased 19000 megs of Supplementary Water in the Gwydir Valley, of which they used 3000 megs out of the first flow in the Gwydir River for a very long time, and have used nothing since – showing that in normal circumstances the Gwydir Wetland is looked after by the natural flow of the river.

When the Gwydir valley received a 10% allocation from Copeton Dam the first for over 30 months, 500 megs of water purchased for the environment by Riverbank was put to tender and sold for significant money, again highlighting the unnecessary purchase of water for the environment, in the Gwydir Valley.

<u>As stated earlier the Gwydir does not flow out of the wetlands except under extreme flooding events – the last event being in 1976, 34 years ago.</u>

<u>Gauge readings at the end of the Gwydir system, give a false reading on flows out of the Gwydir because they are in fact back ups from the Barwon River system.</u>

There should also be a full review made public of just why removing the barrages is an absolute "no go" zone. Menindee Lakes need engineering works to improve efficiency and reduce evaporation. Maybe Broken Hill water supply needs re-sourcing. To just buyback water from the rice and cotton industries and wreck communities is certainly not the answer.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority members have a very big responsibility on their hands to get this right. If the irrigation industry is allowed to be sacrificed to appease the Green vote and the Gillard Government, it will not be long and we will be queued up at the ports waiting for a ship to bring us our food from overseas. Third World here we come.

We hope your Inquiry will help restore some sanity to the issue.

Yours faithfully,

Ian & Robyn Cush
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