

Murray-Darling Basin Problems. With all the publicity and controversy surrounding the Murray-Darling Basin Plan I am astounded that there has been so little mention of the real cause of the problem and so few people demanding that the Government take off their blindfolds and start implementing what can eventually be the only solution unless we are prepared to depopulate Australia back to about ten million people. Two hundred and fifty years ago Australia had a population of less than one million, which begs the question, why did a country as large as this have so few people wandering over it and the answer of course is because, at that time, it was not capable of supporting any more. When our forefathers arrived here they found that a period without rain meant that the creeks and watercourses stopped running and a long period without rain meant the rivers also stopped flowing. Being people with the average amount of commonsense and foresight they realised that the only way they were going to survive here was by building water storage dams on some of the rivers. This they began doing and with the benefit of foresight, they continued to build dams so that by about fifty years ago, there were enough storages to more than service the six million people to which the population had by then grown. Since some of the dams had been built to supply water for irrigation purposes, the Government of the day started issuing more licences with two aims in mind, 1.To increase Australia's agricultural production. 2.To provide themselves with more revenue. They were successful in both instances because, with irrigation, the country's agricultural production increased spectacularly which resulted in a corresponding increase in Government revenue. However, about this time, commonsense and foresight appears to have deserted our politicians and their advisors and stayed away, because during the last fifty years, our population has more than trebled but not one water storage dam of any consequence has been built to provide for the enormous needs of some fifteen million extra people. Throw a ten year period of drought into the equation and is it any wonder our river systems were unable to cope. The Government's reaction to this has been a knee-jerk bandaid solution of massive water buybacks which proves that the commonsense which disappeared fifty years ago has still not returned because even if every megalitre of irrigation water was taken away, the result, while being catastrophic for Australia's economy, would not improve our river systems for very long, the simple reason being that the total quantity of water allocated for irrigation comprised less than 20% of the water in the system. Take away the recent buybacks and that figure would now be closer to 15%. Since the irrigation industry has been getting crucified for the last ten years, let it be left alone for a while and if we wish to waste millions of dollars keeping the Murray- Darling Basin Authority alive, let them use what talent they may possess in finding out what is happening to the other 80+% of water and devising some substantial savings in this major section of usage. Only a short time ago we were bombarded with repetitive statements about "Taking Australia forward", but now the same entities seem determined to push an agenda which can only result in the country going significantly backward. In fact, the whole of the thinking about the Murray-Darling Basin and the Governments attempts to make the same quantity of stored water which existed fifty years ago, serve the ever growing needs of an extra fifteen million people are just like a dog chasing his own tail and are equally as unproductive. What needs doing is to throw the present Murray-Darling Plan in the rubbish tip, repeal the 2007 Water Act and legislate a new one which has enshrined the urgent building of more water storage dams and that they be designated for urban use, environmental use and irrigation use, in equal proportions. In recent years billions of dollars have been thrown around like confetti at a wedding, artificially propping up the economy with short term, largely unproductive schemes which have cost lives and created the largest wave of corruption and graft that Australia has ever seen. By building water storages the country's economy would be significantly and

permanently improved, hundreds of thousands of permanent and productive jobs would be created and our grandchildren and great grandchildren would have a reasonably secure future. There are suitable sites for new dams all over Australia and one which is relevant is the Clarence River in northern NSW. A feasibility study commissioned in 1984 found that dams on its headwaters would provide water for both the eastern and western sides of the dividing range and supply a large portion of the state's power needs through hydroelectricity. Had this scheme been in place last year the Darling and lower Murray would have been running strongly for most of the year instead of being almost dry and a substantial part of the hundreds of millions of dollars of north coast flood damage would have been avoided. It is a certainty that the anti irrigation lobby and other mentally retarded groups will violently oppose the building of more dams and equally certain that concerns about the environment will play a large part in these objections. The current over emphasis on the environment badly needs to be addressed because although it must be protected as well as possible, with the country supporting twenty times and potentially, thirty to forty times more people than it used to support, there is no known way we can survive without having an impact on it. With rivers once again in flood and dams overflowing now is the time to start building more storages because with the population increasing by one third of a million per year, there will in the future, not be enough stored water in normal years, let alone, when the next drought comes along.

John Fensom, NSW