Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural affairs and Transport
Parliament House
House of Representatives
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Solutions that will benefit rivers and communities in Australia's food bowl

I make my submission to your inquiry with suggestions as to how a comprehensive plan for the Murray Darling Basin should be developed for the benefit of rural communities, environmental and food production needs.

The draft plan being promoted at present is really an environmental plan only, and gives no consideration to the two other important aspects of a plan for the future of rural communities and food production. This has been clearly demonstrated by crowd reaction at all the information meetings held in recent times.

The criterion for the present draft plan was set in political haste and does not allow for all needs to be assessed.

If, as the government is insisting, the present plan remains, then it is impossible to amend it and get a balanced outcome having already established an environmental base.

It would be unfair and biased after 2,442 sites for environmental watering have been selected with no consideration for researching the needs for rural communities and food production.

All this draft plan has done is to put a bigger divide between country and city people because of a lack of understanding of how Australia's environmental and food requirements are managed. If city users had cuts of their water by 27-37% to mainly run out to the sea they would certainly complain and demand other options.

Both sides of politics should agree to:-

Amend the present act and bring in a new plan with changed criteria which should be based equally on needs of Rural Communities, Environment and Food Production.

The following sections should be considered as part of the criteria for the new plan.

(A) Rural Communities

- Drought of 10 years has seen the decline of rural towns within the basin
- With the introduction of the present draft plan these towns would continue to decline as with a permanent drought. Breaking up the social economic structure of rural communities will make it more difficult to achieve successful environmental outcomes.

- Rural areas need a plan that will give them confidence for the future

(B) Environment

- All people acknowledge the need to preserve the environment
- The government really depends on rural communities to be the guardians
- This has a proven record of success and acknowledged worldwide
- Australia is a land of variability in climate with droughts and floods and consequently highly variable river flows
- Political, media and city population seem to believe and push public opinion that when the rivers are reduced to their natural state of low or stagnant flows because of drought that they are unhealthy yet this is a natural phenomenon and has been occurring before white settlement
- The native vegetation and fauna have coped with these cycles for centuries and even made genetic changed along the way to survive
- With a regulated river system the periods of stress in rivers in times of drought has been reduced considerably as compared with the early unregulated flows
- The crucial issue is to fulfill the needs of the environment in this Australian variable climate without incurring detrimental consequences to rural communities

It is ironic that the early farming settlers are condemned for using the European system of farming but now environmental groups are supporting the European environmental model. I refer to the selection of 2,442 sites to use water from rivers, for example the Murray, that are generally flat, slow running and flood only once every 15-20 years. In Europe, most rivers have constant supply, are fast flowing and flood environmental sites regularly. Setting up a large number of artificial sites is impractical and wasteful for the Australian climate.

The mistake was made with the Lower Lakes, near the mouth of the Murray, and now all communities are paying for it to keep it supplied. Page 127 of the draft plan refers Scenario 2 of taking 3,000Gl from irrigation. Of that amount an extra 2,000Gl will flow out the mouth making it 7,400GL instead of the existing 5,100 Gl. That means that 1,000GL will only go to other sites from that increase.

The central focus for the environmental increase in the new plan is for water to flow out the Murray mouth to the sea.

(C) Food requirements for next 50 years

- No real thought has been given to this issue
- Our population will increase as well as Asia's, food requirements for both will increase, there is no plan to deal with this
- It should be part of a new plan.

(D) River management

- Urgently needs to be totally controlled by a body independent of the States
- Real reform is often halted by State parochialism and an end result is that the needs of the entire nation are not fulfilled

(E) Investigate bringing water into the Basin

- There are great opportunities to divert additional water into the Basin
- This needs to be included in plan
- The Snowy Scheme and other smaller ones have saved the population in this recent terrible drought
- This is common policy in overseas countries

(F) Acknowledge premium irrigation areas to encourage food production with the most economic use of water

- Intensive food production in areas close to water supply systems
- Enormous water savings can be made and governments have a responsibility to insure the food requirements for the nation

(G) Open Barrages on the Murray River and put weir at Wellington

- This one action would save 1 million megalitres of water per year.
- Provide water needs to those being serviced from the lakes via piping.

(H) Investigate opportunities for additional storage.

Buying water entitlements will not find water in years of drought. The present system of allocation is an effective self correcting mechanism as State Authorities regulate water as to its availability. However, government seems to want to push the perception that buying entitlements will be the answer. If the several billion dollars to be spent on farmer's water entitlements was used to build diversion schemes, remove barrages, build weir at Wellington and infrastructure to service lake users ,a balanced outcome could be achieved.

I urge the committee to take up my suggestions as part of a new plan for the Murray Darling Basin for the future welfare of our country and its people. This is a huge issue and the Parliament needs to take the time required to get all the facts clearly presented before any decision is made.

Irrigators and their rural communities have improved their use of water by over 15% since reform started in 1995 and throughout the drought years.

If the environmental sector could do the same no irrigation cuts would be needed and the environment would retain 19,000GL which is a substantial amount.

What also has been lacking in the recent debate is a real cost benefit analysis for environmental water.

Unfortunately a lot of hysteria and panic has accompanied the debate seeing water restrictions, low storages and slowing rivers caused by the worst drought our living population has experienced and I have no doubt that decisions within the existing draft plan have been partly based on this situation. The MDBA statistics show that average extraction has been 13,700 GL per year but for the last 3 years the

total of irrigation extraction used for food production has been only 11,092GL and now the Basin is in flood.

The fact that storages and rivers can flooded, as is now the case, must also be slotted into the criteria when formulating a new plan.

Yours sincerely

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15th December 2010