Murray Darling Basin Plan

Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport Department of the Senate

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I write in reference to the effect on Lockington & Districts farmers, businesses and community if the Murray Darling Basin Plan proceeds and removes up to 51% water from our irrigators.

Along with my husband Brendan and his father Desmond we have owned the local Supermarket and Hardware business in Lockington since April 1978. During this period we have strived to reinvest in our business and staff to improve our offer and increase profitability. We currently employ thirty University and Secondary Students as well as other full-time and part-time adults. We are one of the largest private employers in our District. Hardware sales for 2002-03 reached nearly $900 000. Since 2003 the drought has reduced the number of farmers in our catchment whilst limiting farmer's disposable income. Hardware sales for 2009-10 declined to less than $200 000. We currently carry over $150 000 of hardware core range. To reduce stock weight we order stock by customer request rather than tie money up in stock that doesn't turnover quickly. This is not an ideal situation as customers want the product today and normally can't wait a week. We are now in a quandary of whether to continue selling hardware just as the weather is more conducive to farmers making a profit and spending money on hardware.

Our business also includes Elgas, Davey pumps and sales, Newsagency, bakery, liquor, Foodworks Supermarket. Our business is supported by other businesses in our District. Lockington business Centre is staffed by volunteers selling fuel, opportunity shop and staffing the Men's shed. Education is promoted through our Primary School, Pre-School and Play Group and additional training courses through the Business Centre. Health is promoted through the Lockington Bush Nursing Centre including visiting Doctors, Specialist visitors including; Podiatrists, Osteopath, Diabetic Clinician, District Nurses, Planned Activity Groups, and Maternal Child Health. The following are some of our local businesses who advertise in the Lockington Community News; Yvette's Field, Locky Meats, Locky Library, Treasure Chest, Lockington Engineering, Lockington Garage, Bamawm Engineering, Lockington Hotel, Colours Cuts & Curls with Providore on Hopetoun, The Paint girls, Pinegrove Natives, Field Cactus Garden, RC & HA Kilsby Builders, Norlec Plumbing, P G Electrics, Scurton Parcels, Lockington Takeaway, Lockington Post Office, Farmers are supported by S & J Contracting, , K Bacon Hay contracting, D J Answer Contracting, Dyson's Trading, J T E trading, Thomas Harry Contracting, Norm & Dot Moon Transport, GJ & MA Gardiner Transport, Wrights

Haulage & Grain Traders, Ovens Grains, J & C Wickham Excavations, CJ Excavations, Ricky's spraying, Schroen's Irrigation Survey & Design, G & M Lasering, K & P Humbert Lasering & Levelling, Stones Dairy Services and Maddison's Livestock.

Lockington District farming land is zoned just that, 'Farming'. Farmers are not permitted to subdivide their land for new housing with less than one hundred acres. If farmers don't farm for ten years they are required to apply for a permit to farm, too bad if the new neighbour disagrees with the pending farm smells next door and objects to farming the land, as has been the case recently. Our area is considered the food bowl and responsible for feeding the nation as well as creating export income. Our farmers continue to improve farming techniques being the safest and cleanest non subsidised producers of food in the world. Consider how farmers feel at the moment, they are being pushed to their limits to sell their water. The drought has shown farmers can't farm sustainably without water. The drought has also shown support businesses to the farmers that we rely on profitable farmers. We now have several farms with hobby horse farms, this has caused additional problems as horses graze the ground bare and the land owners are also competing with locals for employment as their farms aren't sustainable.

Lockington and Districts has strong sports focus including: Tennis, Football, Netball, Cricket, Badminton, Basketball, Golf, Bowls, Pony Club and two Camp Drafts. We also have a Lions Club, Action Club, Heritage Committee, Seniors Units and four Churches including one that has its own choir. We have a Dance Club, Fitness Training Group, Senior Citizens Group and five CFA Committees. With favourable community infrastructure we are seeing a return of our children who are having starting their families and growing our community. Our population has a future

We are very fortunate to have businesses, sporting clubs and groups for farmers, employees, seniors, and employers to be involved in. This time out allows a release from the ongoing stresses that has continued since the commencement of the drought. Our community continues to suffer at the hands of both State and Federal Government that is not committed to drought proofing the country, but continues to take rather than make water. We have seen the Campaspe water sought by Bendigo for human consumption whilst Bendigo water leaks through plumbing installed by Chinese during the gold mining era and Coliban Water profiteered by selling off carry over water at the start of the drought. Since then we have had added controversy with the North South Pipeline removing irrigation water for the Yarra in Melbourne. Now we face the Murray Darling Basin Plan with an expectation to have 95% of the Murray mouth open for flows. When will common sense prevail?

If the Irrigators are paid for their water we will see the demise of what is considered the Australian food bowl and prime productive land. When farmers take their money from water sales to work elsewhere, Lockington and District will be left with an ageing and transient population. Elderly people will be unable to afford housing in nearby regional centres. Costs to keep the aged at home will increase as community support and businesses cease. Issues with transport, information technology, employment, health, education and community safety will all increase. Centralising populations to Regional Centres will continue to prove difficult as sustainable water solutions still have not been solved. When the Government makes payments to farmers for water sales and reduces the support businesses financial viability, we too will expect to be compensated!

Yours sincerely

Leanne Pentreath

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Lockington & Districts Community Plan Group.