Submission to Murray Darling Basin Plan

Credentials WD & H Morgan

Agricultural Science Dookie College

Dairy Farming Invergordon - East Shepparton Irrigation since 1960

Concurrent Agricultural teaching Dairy Apprenticeship TAFE for 20 years

Dairy Farming Peak 600 cows - 240,000kgs milk solids per annum. Self sufficient fodder. Currently reduced to 400 cows due to reduced water over several years.

Submission

We reject the "Willing Seller" proposal to obtain water by government purchase. Those sellers are forced to sell in order to survive financially or quit the industry. They should be able to sell to other farmers and not speculative non land owners. Government ownership leaves the way for privatisation of the water and a threat to food production. Food prodcution is becoming of great interest to world powers. Foreign ownership of land and water, is contrary to production of clean high quality food.

Family farms are capable of having positive effects on the environment if they are allowed to use their resources and are assisted to improve on economic productivity above 2% per year. Sufficient funding should be alloted to LANDCARE catchment authority groups for educational and practical on farm environmental activities. These have contributed in the past 20 years to salinity interception and could be a bigger factor in run off of nutrients and soil erosion control. Research retention of plant material allowing carbon storage in soils should be heavily funded. All these and other methods if funded could help to allow dairy farmers and other ag industries to be sustainable and economically viable.

I want to stress the idea that farmers are in a much better position (physically managing plants and animals) to enhance local environment, including vermon, weed control and to provide habitat that allows existing and attracting bird and insect life in harmony with the grass and animal production which will aid in the profitable production of high quality "clean" foods to supply the fresh and manufactured product industries which employ people in the local towns. A point of interest is The Port of Melbourne has milk products as its biggest value cargoes and employer.

I would like to dispute a statement made by a professor from Sydney re the figures on the small loss of production of milk products due to drought. Reasons:

1. On a local level many farmers sold their water and herds and ceased dairy farming to live on dry retirement.

2. In our case we reduced cow numbers from 600 to 400 which caused the corresponding loss in production. We were forced to rely on the banks.

3. Murray Goulburn Milk Company was forced to sell a factory at Leitchville because of low milk supply.

4. Some farmers maintain their production by borrowing heavily to purchase fodder and grain.

If water is reduced further as per plan, production will drop by a direct proportion of fodder not grown. If the cuts are made by removing some farmers with the sale of water, the remaining irrigation farms become unviable due to increase in irigation costs created by the reduction in volume.

The current return to wet season has enable dams to fill, habitat to be restored, birds and insects returning and so there should be no hurry to rush into a plan which is not fully scientific based and give time to become so.

Because of the improvements to irrigation supply, farmers will benefit from increased fodder production, but will require this to happen over a period of years to be able to repay their loans. If cuts to irrigation are to be made by the authority, recovery would not occur. In our case this would seriously threaten our retirement as the value of the farm would remain subdued. And when sold the mortgage paid out, there would be insufficient left for retirement and age pension would be required. Secondly the remaining farmers will have the increased cost of administration etc, and this would make them unsustainable and this would follow on through to all the supporting industries and towns.