Murrumbidgee Groundwater Inc

Submission to the

Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport

The Murray-Darling Basin

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Introduction:

Murrumbidgee Groundwater Inc (MGI) represents approximately 270,000 megalitres of groundwater entitlements shared by approximately 250 groundwater users in the Murrumbidgee Valley which comprises a large agricultural area in the vicinity of 84,000 square kilometres in the south west of NSW. MGI members generation of food and fibre production support the townships of Leeton, Griffith, Darlington Point, Coleambally, Hay, Carathool and Jerilderie. Many of the farming enterprises provide extensive employment opportunities due to the high labour component required to plant and harvest their commodities.

The main production categories are summer crops such as corn, sorghum, sunflowers, rice, cotton, prime lambs, beef cattle, wine grapes, citrus, almonds and wool.

Our region has been through the Achieving Sustainable Groundwater Entitlements program (ASGE) funded by the Commonwealth and NSW governments. The program aimed to reduce the use of groundwater in our region to a sustainable level. As a result our constituents have already worn a high level of water reform and have been forced to restructure their farming operations to adjust to the changes.

The guide to the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan appears to have recognized the measures that have been taken in our groundwater region, however MGI wish to point out some broader issues that our organisation thinks the MDBA should strongly consider.

General Comments:

Murrumbidgee Groundwater Inc is in full support of the response submitted by Murrumbidgee Private Irrigators Inc (MPII), however wish to outline some key measures our organisation urges the MDBA to consider in regard to groundwater when developing the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

As stated earlier in this submission, whilst our region is not facing any significant cuts via the guide to the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan, our organisation is very concerned over the lack of knowledge that the MDBA staff have shown during the engagement process in relation to groundwater behaviour. Therefore, MGI strongly suggest that the MDBA lean on hydrologists that work within the NSW Office of Water to seek their local knowledge and many years on expertise dealing with groundwater issues and levels of use in their sector of the Murray Darling Basin.

The prolonged ten year drought led government agencies to focus on the groundwater resource in the Murray Darling Basin with groundwater being perceived as a reliable source of water.

It is imperative that the MDBA revisit their findings now that the basin has experienced a deluge of water creating groundwater resources to be replenished.

Moreover, MGI hold grave concerns for its neighbouring groundwater users in the Lachlan Valley where hideous cuts to groundwater have been suggested under the guide to the proposed MDBP.

Equivalent to surface water entitlement holders, the suggested reduction to groundwater usage in the Lachlan Valley lacks justifiable reasoning and no consideration for the social and economic implications.

Recommendations:

MGI recommend that the MDBA continue to monitor what is happening with groundwater extraction behaviour, water levels and water quality over the life of the Water Sharing Plan's in **all** valleys prior to making any reductions to extractions.

MGI also recommend that the Authority acknowledge that usage behaviour will change given that the Water Sharing Plans were introduced in 2008 during the peak of a severe drought.

MPII Contact
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End