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Submission Re MDBA Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan

I write this submission with great disappointment that a group of 'so called' experts, the MDBA, have used my hard earned tax payer dollars to develop a plan that is so unbalanced. The guide to the Basin Plan has given little, if any regard to the social and economic impact on the communities affected – it has been totally biased toward the environment.

A Balanced approach is needed

This proposed plan if implemented in its current format will destroy our community. My husband and I grew up in this area and have had the opportunity to live in both Western Sydney and the regional community of Albury. We have chosen to return to Leeton to raise our family and build a business because it is such a fantastic place to live and work.

We hope that we will provide employment for many locals and eventually have a legacy to leave our son. Country people are very skilled at coping with change and looking after one another but we need a 'fair go'. I implore you to seek a more balanced plan which takes into account with equal value the social, economic and environmental impact.

Social and Economic Impact

Many farmers will be forced off their land because they are 'desperate sellers' not 'willing sellers' of their water. Farmers will have the opportunity to receive some compensation in the form of water buy backs. But with it goes generations of tradition, knowledge and food security. What about those who choose to continue farming? They will be faced with higher costs to maintain the infrastructure to get the water to the farm gate –the flow on is higher food prices.

Mental health is a grave concern to me. Many farmers including my parents, uncles, sister and brother in law have been holding on the best they can throughout the drought. The announcement of such an unbalanced plan has removed hope for many of these people – if hope is removed people become desperate, and desperate people don't always make rational decisions. Our medical facilities are already stretched to their limit –if a plan like this is allowed then the health system will be placed under even greater pressure, the divorce rate will increase, and our unemployment rate will raise –all costing the tax payer and the community more.

I am a small business owner in Leeton and the President of The Leeton Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Unfortunately there has been no talk of businesses being compensated. Every business is interdependent in small rural communities. There will be no compensation for the drop in value of Real Estate; businesses will have to close their doors. There will be no compensation for families that are forced to leave the area to seek employment. There is no compensation for the loss of

infrastructure/essential services such as education, medical facilities and jobs -the flow on effect is huge. All of these people will be forced to move to larger regional centres and the cities that are already choked with people, forcing the cost of housing to raise, more congestion on roads, less time for families to spend together and high food prices.

How do I tell my son that he can't play footy, because there won't be enough kids to make a team; or that he can't go to Scouts because the Scout Leader had to leave town to look for work; or that he has to study some subjects at school by correspondence because there are not enough students to form a class. Or worse that we have to move away from his family and friends because our business is no longer viable. This decision affects every family, every business and every community in the Murray Valley not just Irrigators.

Economic development officers have to fight to attract business and investors to rural areas and the release of this guide has already done immeasurable damage to economic confidence. After 10yrs of drought many businesses were optimistic about the future –they were filled with HOPE. The guide to the Plan has quashed that hope. To think that the 'experts' have predicted a loss of 800 jobs is ridiculous. The basin plan means less water for everyone from the corner store to the town doctor. A fair, balanced decision must be announce and quickly before the landslide of uncertainty cripples our economy.

Food Security

The MIA was built specifically as a food producing area we are one of the largest producers of citrus, rice, wine, wheat and meat in Australia. This food not only provides food to Australia but also the world. Australia has a rapidly growing population. Less water means less food. Less food means higher food prices. Less food means more imports –with food quality and security being under threat. Heaven forbid the breakout of war in one of our neighbouring nations –we would not be able to import enough food to support Australia's needs.

Farmers have great ingenuity and they have made great advances in farming practice with every generation. As science and technology have developed so has farming practice. Every farmer wants to see a health river system our livelihood and many social activities revolve around it. But there must be a balanced fair approach so that we can all prosper and flourish. Keep in mind for hundreds of years before irrigation the river system regularly ran dry – and with rain “mother nature” amazingly sprang back to life.

What needs to be done....

We welcome the announcement of the inquiries but we need this to lead to action, not just a drain on more tax payer dollars. We need the decisions to be fair and balanced and we need it to come as quickly as possible.

In the short term we need a balanced plan that takes into account with equal value the social, economic and environmental impact of such a plan. There are many alternatives out there to support communities and the environment that do not require taking 43% of our water – this would effectively place some of the richest food producing areas in permanent MAN MADE drought. There is a room for everyone to prosper with a 'fair go'. We all want to see a healthy environment our livelihood depends on it.

In the medium term we must review/amend the Water Act which seems to be at the basis of all of the problems it too needs to reflect a balanced approach for social, economic and environmental concerns. We also need to put a stop to overseas countries buying our water rites, our land and our companies.

In the long term we need to develop infrastructure to capture all of the abundant rainfall that nature provides and gets wasted. This will generate jobs, it will ease the pressure on over populated cities, and it will provide longer term water/ food security for our growing population. More importantly it will provide hope and opportunity for future generations.

As a mother, business woman and passionate community member - I implore you to seek a more balanced plan which takes into account with equal value the social, economic and environmental impact.

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