

9th March 2011

Senate Inquiry into the Provisions of the Water Act 2007
The Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISIONS OF THE
WATER ACT 2007**

The Water Act 2007 (hereafter referred to as the Act) sets out to distribute sustainably the resources of water in the Murray-Darling Basin between the extractors for irrigation and farm use and the needs of the environment. This Act should be retained in its present form.

Decades of mismanagement of flow allocations and therefore allowance of over extraction of water has resulted in the dismal plight of the Murray-Darling Basin. The less the flow in the rivers the greater the salinity of the remaining water and surrounding land and, the greater the salinity, the more damage caused to the ecosystems.

It is well known that River Red Gum wetland forests have declined by 80%. With only one-fifth of these precious forests left they will be lost unless drastic steps are taken to save them. The less forest there is to attract cloud formation in the areas concerned the more droughts with

resulting ever decreasing rainfall to the detriment of all – communities, rivers, fauna and flora. It is not only for the benefit of the environment but for the benefit of the river communities that the rivers be kept healthy.

Apart from the decline in the River Red Gum forests there has been a loss of 90% of the flood plain wetlands with a concomitant loss of 90% of the native fish population and 80% of the native birdlife. Humans, animals, trees and other flora and all fauna are interdependent. Each has its part to play in the maintenance of a healthy world in which to live.

It must be kept in mind that it is imperative to maintain the present good flows in the rivers as long as possible to flush out the vast amount of salinity present in the water and the erstwhile drought stricken surrounding land. The rivers will never be healthy while there is salinity present in the water and the land around.

The Act was legislated for the purpose of ensuring that extraction of the water resources is returned to environmentally sustainable levels that protect, restore and provide for the ecological values and ecosystem services of the Murray-Darling Basin. This Act provides broadly for the delivery of a Basin Plan that is environmentally sound and scientifically strong enough to carry out its purpose. The reduction of water extraction and the return of the water to the environment is long overdue.

The Act was introduced to correct the imbalance in the use of water in the Basin. This use of water has been heavily weighted towards extraction for irrigation for too long leading to highly stressed rivers, forests,, animals and degradation of land.

We, members of Mudgee District Environment Group Inc, urge this Senate Committee to preserve the Water Act 2007 in its present form .

- The Act gets the balance right between the communities dependent upon the rivers and the health of the rivers.

- The Act recognises the need to return water extraction to long-term sustainable levels and this must remain the focus.
- The Act correctly recognises the need to reduce water extraction and return water to the environment in order to restore the health of the ecosystems and the future of the communities.
- Water must not be politicised as in the past where the balance of water use in the Basin has been heavily weighted against the environment. The Act correctly acknowledges the need to base decisions about sustainable water extraction levels on the best available science, social and environmental considerations. The Act also relies on scientific and not political considerations.
- Healthy rivers mean healthy communities.

Thank you for the opportunity for us to place our views before the Committee.

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