

Corryong Branch VFF

Doug Paton ,President

13th December 2010

To: **The Senate Inquiry M.D.B.A**

This Submission is made on behalf of the Corryong Branch of Victorian Farmers Federation after considerable discussion of the MDBA proposed plan.

Brief Towong Shire Facts

Area: 6,635 sq kms

Population: 6,019 (2006 Actual ABS)

Annual Rainfall: 892.83 mm

Water resources: 700 kms of Rivers, Lake Dartmouth, Lake Hume.

Here in the upper Catchment at the head waters of the Murray River and its tributaries above Lake Hume, figures reveal that 18-19% of the inflows into the MDB come from the rainfall harvested from private and public land in the UPPER CATCHMENT. The figures in the MDBA plan don't appear to recognize the contribution made from our area.

Relevant Points:

- Almost 26% is agricultural based with small number of irrigators operating out of the rivers/creeks, streams and small number out of ground water holes and bores. However, the area is predominately dry land enterprises with little chance of using the water that falls on and flows across their land apart from stock & domestic use. (*It's quite surreal that I am writing this submission when last night in 6hrs we had between 70-90 ml of rain fall on our property causing massive asset and infrastructure damage from some ones else's water!*)
- This brings me to the division in communities between upstream providers and downstream irrigators. Downstream irrigators think it's great if we are getting flooded out to fill the storages so they can hopefully have 100% allocation for the coming season
- There is not any acknowledgement/recognition of the contribution from the dry land farmers in the Upper Catchments
- We, here at the source seem to be overlooked over the years in favour of the downstream users.

- We know that we have contributed a significant amount in megalitres (18-19%) to the well-being of the MDB economically, socially and environmentally, without any compensation, recognition, inducement, reward or acknowledgement to the dry land farmers at the source for providing a high quality clean resource which comes at a cost in flood times.
- However, there are several schemes available to downstream users; buy back of allocation, relocation/ exit \$\$, infrastructure inducements, grants available to become more efficient etc. etc.
- More division between upstream catchment farmers and downstream irrigators. Let's get some equality onto the table. We all acknowledge that we all have a duty of care to all involved. (Share of the pie for the triple bottom line)
- Proposal to be considered is that a percentage of the yield from landowners property's rainfall should be available to the landowners for drought proofing, diversification of enterprises etc simply by pumping it out in times of need without the expense and administration costs/paperwork of storage facilities.
- Farmers in the upper catchment have traditionally paid higher land values and rates for having a good reliable water source connected with the property, only to have that taken away re: **Farm Dams**
- The Farm Dams act duded the upstream caretakers of the resource.(clean water running over private and public lands without any contaminants)
- We fail to see that you can have a water act that only caters for environmental needs in isolation without considering community, social and economic needs holistically.
- In relation to unregulated streams in the Murray catchments of Victoria, we are concerned it appears that our area above Lake Hume has been included with the mid Murray area below the storage dams. (P. 105 –SS2)
- Also on page 112 – end of system flows, our upper Murray catchments area is shown as having the same poor outcome as most of the regulated irrigation area. Yet the Ovens and Kiewa systems show a good outcome, despite a much higher irrigation usage than in the upper Murray.
- Water use on the UR. Streams in Vic. is already restricted during low flow situations to protect the environmental conditions within individual streams, measured near the end of each stream and applied to all users on that stream, except domestic and stock.
- The % of total flow used by diverters on these streams during “average” seasons is very low, the remaining water passing on to Lake Hume to become available as irrigation area water.
- Regulated areas are free to trade water to adjust businesses to changes and reductions of water rights. However Unregulated streams (Vic.) have very restrictive rules regarding trading, i.e. can only trade downstream, and 20% of water is forfeited on trade, making it difficult for users to adjust. Water trade is very rare in UR areas.
- We believe our streams are not as stressed as your plans study indicates, and the “environmental outcomes” are similar to the neighbouring Ovens and Kiewa valleys.
- Therefore the upper Murray catchments should not suffer the same reductions as the regulated Murray downstream.

- Groundwater usage in our valleys is mostly “shallow” underground flows on the floodplains that most believe have “connectivity” to nearby surface streams.
- At present (in Vic.) use of this groundwater is not restricted during dry times even though surface water streams are on restricted use. We think that all water use in a valley catchment should operate under the same conditions.
- The views of the upper catchment members are unique/different to some of those expressed in VFF submissions which appear to cater for the numbers, being the downstream irrigators and communities.

*****The submission below was put in by the Corryong Branch VFF in 2008 and we seem to be repeating ourselves. It needs to be read in conjunction with updated submission which is included above in 2010.***

CORRYONG BRANCH VFF

14 March 2008

Department of Sustainability and Environment
Attention: **Sustainable Water Strategies Branch**, Office of Water

This Submission is made on behalf of the Corryong Branch of Victorian Farmers Federation after considerable discussion of the Sustainable Water Strategy Northern Region paper.

Firstly, we consider the scope of the discussion paper to be very limited. Although Corryong and the Upper North East Victorian region is included in the maps contained in the document, as in the past Upper Catchment landholders appear to have been left out of consideration of crucial issues in favour of downstream irrigators. Is this strategy to be another example of the masses being treated as more important than the few? The community as a whole should be equally considered.

SOURCE:

In Fact Sheet 1 under “Managing Our Water Resources” it is claimed, “*The Northern Region has been built on a foundation of reliable water supplies from the Murray River and its tributaries. This is the key factor in the region’s ongoing prosperity.*” This is precisely why this and similar areas were settled, long before irrigation systems were developed to make agricultural/horticultural land attractive downstream. The potential offered by reliable water supplies from our high rainfall, natural run-off, and fertile valley soils was huge. This potential balanced the disadvantages of our isolation and significant burden of transport costs and lack of access to services.

Over the years, our sustainable natural potential has been diminished by legislation to facilitate the artificially enhanced, environmentally damaging, more expensive and difficult to sustain irrigation areas downstream. The efficiency of using water closer to its source appears to have been overlooked in previous planning. Likewise, the economic advantages of decentralising, with people and industry moving closer to the source rather than wastefully trying to move the water, have not been recognised.

YIELD:

The difference in yield since European settlement of Australia is suggested to be 10% to 15% from 40% cleared land in the catchment. Yield increases of .381m GL (from 10%) and .587m GL (15%) compare with .237m GL held in farm dams.

- The increased yield of water should be allocated to the catchment farmers who have created this situation.
- We believe private landholders should be entitled to harvest rainwater yield at the same rate as the Government can from crown/public lands.
- The impact of bushfires must be considered with the water quality/ biodiversity/flow rate issues that result from denuded catchments.

CLIMATE CHANGE:

Climate change scenarios fail to account for changing land use management practices in the catchment to maintain production. In order to be sustainable, land managers may be forced to increase water use efficiency by various means. Changing soil structure by use of lime, gypsum etc., keyline ripping, absorption banks, deep-rooted perennial pastures, tree plantations, raising soil carbon levels, may be employed. As a result yield will be further reduced, as will recharges to groundwater.

WATER SAVINGS:

- We believe it is dangerous to consider recycled water and stormwater as “new water”. This is a complete fallacy. It is still the result of the same rainfall event and is merely a more efficient use of water.
- Developers of new housing estates need to be more responsible for water services.
- Rainwater tanks should be subsidised for rural dwellings as they are in urban areas.

GROUND WATER:

The connection between ground and surface water is still being assessed. Decisions regarding the access of ground water will have major impacts on future production and land use. We believe there should be more discussion on this subject included in the paper. Ground water rights should be directly linked to related farm size and yield of groundwater aquifer.

TRADING:

“Water users now have greater flexibility in how they manage their business.” This is certainly not true for water users in the upper catchment on unregulated systems. As water can only be traded downstream, severe limitations occur, and where trade is possible, 20% of water purchased even as a temporary trade, must go to the environment although the full amount must be paid for. **If this is the case for unregulated systems, why not for regulated systems?** We don’t agree with anyone having to pay for water they don’t receive. *(This may have been partially addressed since 2008.)*

How do upper catchment or unregulated users access more water or transfer it back to the area from downstream? If this could be done, benefits from no transmission loss should be recognized. There is a concern that in time; all water will end up downstream.

NON-IRRIGATORS:

Dryland farmers certainly do not have greater flexibility in how they manage their business, being unable to clear land and having only limited ability to harvest the rain falling on their land or water running over it. The cost of lack of opportunity to diversify is not being recognised.

Sleeper Licences should be fed back into the sales pool if unused for a certain period for better use of available water. Future water strategies cannot allow “wasted” water rights to be held without use within the system. *(This may have been partially addressed since 2008.)*

WATER USE EFFICIENCY:

- We need incentives to use off-stream storages more efficiently. Winter-fill storages should be encouraged.
- Solar pumps instead of environmentally threatening diesel and electric pumps should be subsidised for stock water supplies away from streams.
- Water quality would improve with fenced creeks/streams and off-stream livestock watering systems.
- Goulburn-Murray Water's Stock & Domestic Licence costs are becoming prohibitive for landholders to fence off streams. Water for such a licence currently has to be purchased from upstream which in upper catchment is virtually impossible.
- When transferring licensed water from one dam to another on the same farm, no losses in water should be incurred if the original licensed dam is downsized.

TREES:

We believe 2ML/Ha/annually is used for forestry. As yet there is no regulating of water or land use for gravity irrigators. It is claimed that market forces dictate water use. We appear to be developing an approach, which does not consider water users as a whole. The burden of water sustainability must be shared and not borne more heavily by the upper catchment with limitations of water and land use.

NEED FOR EQUALITY:

To date no compensation has been paid to losers in catchments for loss of water (e.g. Snowy River) Compensation has been proposed for irrigators who lose supply for environmental water but none has been proposed for upper catchment landholders for loss of rainwater harvesting rights or for land clearing bans.

Measures to improve salinity and silting up problems within the irrigation system have been publicly funded. **No assistance to catchment farmers with lime etc. to maintain or improve water quality by reducing soil acidity has been available.**

All contributing factors should be considered – land clearing, etc., impact on present and future yields, as well as payments to catchment landholders to manage a certain way to increase/maintain yields.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT:

The regulated flows down the Murray have deprived the wetlands and riparian forests of their necessary inundation for survival. Water for environmental use is now sent down the river only after these areas are suffering from obvious stress i.e. dead or dying vegetation. Instead of receiving the pre-irrigation winter and spring floods, these areas now receive later “maintenance”

flows at other times and in reduced amounts resulting in increased waste through evaporation. A more natural solution needs to be found for environmental health.

SOCIAL IMPACT:

Change of water/land use and its impact on communities must be considered.

- Unbundling of water may condemn some areas to a dry future with lack of opportunity to develop or diversify land use.
- Transfer of water = transfer of wealth.
- Shrinking rural communities have to struggle to maintain services and organizations.
- Zoned land use restricts use of properties as superannuation in many areas.
- We are dealing with so many stresses – drought, fire, climate change scenarios, water scarcity, inflated fuel prices, reduced profit margins, longer working hours affecting physical and mental health and family life and creating social problems, increased paperwork, and restriction of fair water trade. How can we encourage our younger generation back from the cities or mines, onto the land to replace our aging farmers?

The Australian farmer, particularly in upper catchment areas, appears to be a threatened species. Imported food and fibre won't be so appealing to consumers when that is their only option. We are certainly priced out of international competition.

REPRESENTATION:

Areas of our concern are -

- Are Upper Catchment landholders adequately represented on the project team for this discussion paper to develop the Sustainable Water Strategy?
- To what degree have northeast farmers/rural landholders had the opportunity to contribute?
- Will our views and concerns receive equal consideration with those of the downstream irrigators who benefit from and depend upon our practices and efficiency in managing our land and water resources?

We trust that we will be considered throughout the expansion of this Murray Darling Basin Plan process.

Doug Paton

President Corryong VFF