



A Response to the Draft Guide to the Murray Darling Basin Plan

152 Oaklands Road Berrigan 2712 NSW - 03 5885 2392 0416 156429
info@corugan.com.au

A Brief History of West Corugan P.I.D:

The concept of the West Corugan Private Irrigation District was first recorded in a document 'The Case for Corugan' published in 1938.

From that point the commitment of the proponents of the scheme was unwavering right up to the commissioning of the West Corugan Private Irrigation District on the 12th of April 1969.

The District straddles the municipalities of Berrigan, Corowa, Jerilderie and Urana, covering a tract of land 212,000 hectares, delivering irrigation to 21,200 hectares via 565 kilometres of open channel.

The Headworks is located 10 kilometres downstream of Corowa, lifting water 13 metres via 5 pumps into the Main Channel. From there the water is dispersed via gravity over the entire length and breadth of the district as far northwest as the Billabong Creek.

The district is bounded by the townships of Berrigan, Corowa, Oaklands, Jerilderie and Urana.

Agribusiness in the district includes but is not limited to beef, dairy, lamb and pork production, wool as well as rice, wheat, barley, potato and fodder cropping.

Future agribusiness enterprises include but are not limited to fruit and vegetable production utilising open and reticulating irrigation practices together with wine grapes, flowers and aquaculture enterprises.

The W.C.P.I.D is privately owned and fully funded by its membership. It does not enjoy the benefit of any funding or financial assistance by the State or Federal government.

West Corugan Private Irrigation District has delivered irrigation to 340 farms operated by 217 members for 40 years with maximum efficiency.

A Brief History of the Murray:

The following passages are lifted from a Murray Darling Basin Commission publication.

'The Murray' was published by the MDBC in 1990, edited by Norman McKay and David Eastburn.

The second key to understanding the Murray is its capricious behavior, its variability. Rivers have long been recognized as unpredictable. As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted: 'You cannot step in the same river twice'. But the Murray is even less predictable than other rivers; the monsoon weather patterns of the Darling catchment and the southern temperate patterns of the Murray catchment act as two more or less independent oscillators. A flood down the Darling may coincide with a drought over the Murray catchment, or vice versa. Occasionally floods coinciding in both Rivers cause havoc on the floodplain downstream of the Darling junction.

The average annual flow in the Murray is around 11,000 gigalitres, but this average figure is misleading. Murray flow varies from virtually nil during drought years, up to 40,000 gigalitres during a wet year. So variable is its flow that, despite all of the water now stored and diverted for

irrigation upstream, it is impossible to prove statistically that River flow below the Darling junction has decreased significantly over the 100 years for which reliable flow records have been kept.

Part 1 – Understanding the Murray by Norman McKay. The chapter ‘Living With Uncertainty’ Pages xi, xiv.

It is very significant and relevant that this conclusion was reached in 1990, preceding the decade long drought from which we have just emerged.

The actual flows in the Murray-Darling system are extremely variable. Compared with other river systems in the world, the extreme flood flows are very large in relation to the average flow and the extreme drought flows are very small. Because of this variability, a few drought or flood sequences close together can cloud any attempt to assess changes in flow from a direct examination of historical flow data. In fact, it is not even possible to prove statistically (at the 95% confidence level) that there has been a decreasing trend in the flow at the South Australian border over the last 80 years, despite the fact that diversions upstream are now greater than the current average annual flow to South Australia. Comparing periods before and after the construction of key storages (such as Hume Dam in 1936), can be equally misleading because there have been more floods and fewer droughts in the last 40 years than in the 40 years before. In addition it can be seen from the plots of diversion and installed storage capacity that the situation has been changing rapidly over the last 40 years. It is therefore not possible to obtain a long period that is representative of current conditions.

A more satisfactory evaluation can be achieved using computer models of the river system. In a computer model the diversion of water for irrigation, the flow in the rivers and the storage in the reservoirs are represented mathematically. The relationships between demand for water and rainfall, flow in the river and losses, and storage in each reservoir and its outflows and inflows are written into the computer program. Before use, the model is tested to ensure that it can accurately reproduce the historical behavior of the system. If the model is unable to do this, then the program is refined until the reproduction of historical behavior is satisfactory.

The Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) uses a computer model called the Monthly Simulation Model to study the behaviour of the system.

Part 2 – River Form and Flow. The chapter ‘The impact of Man on the Natural Flow Regime’ by Andrew Close , Section -Method Used to Estimate the Change in Flow Regime, pages 64,65.

This information demonstrates the ‘Flawed Science’ referred to by residents of the Murray Darling Basin at the community consultation meetings held across the region following the release of Part I of the Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan.

Using a Monthly Simulation Model and then refining the program would lead a cynical observer to reasonably conclude the MSM had been manipulated to deliver pre determined data.

The Draft Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan:

Regrettably only Parts I and II of a 21 Volume publication have been made available to the community for examination and comment prior to the due date for a submission in response to the Guide.

Part I Section 7 does not address the true social and economic impact that the proposed reductions in allocation will inflict on communities with any accuracy or clarity. It relies on economic computer modelling as opposed to acquiring real data from real people with real concerns for their future.

Part II Section 2 – 2.6 Basin Water Resources Rainfall contains no reference to or acknowledgement of excessive rain events such as we have experienced from 14 October, and the direct impact on the Murray and its ability to cope with uncontrolled flows.

The sustained Rain Event in our region from 14 October, demonstrates the inability of the bodies regulating water behaviour in the Basin, to properly manage the flow of the Murray Darling system when a real rain event occurs.

It is reasonable to conclude that the next decade will see a return to Historic Seasonal Rainfall across the Murray Darling Basin.

It would therefore be appropriate to acquire, assess and act on real data instead of the inherent risk of computer modelling.

It is clearly evident that the level of engagement by the MDBA with residents of the Murray Darling Basin has been unilateral and autocratic.

The presentation of the Guide to the Proposed Plan by senior MDBA personnel including the former Chairman did nothing to instill confidence in the residents of the Murray Darling Basin.

There was a distinct lack of transparency and bilateral engagement.

Time to have another look at the Issue:

The recent rain event from October 14 across the Murray Darling Basin is timely and providential.

An examination of all the current data in regard to restored groundwater tables, catchments, the behaviour of creeks and rivers, the impact of significant uncontrolled flows on indigenous riverine inhabitants will require a review of the Technical Information contained in the Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan largely derived from Computer Modelling Practices.

It would also be appropriate to seek and compile Anecdotal Evidence from local residents with intimate knowledge of such events in the past.

What is occurring today all over the catchment of the Murray Darling Basin substantiates the allegations of 'Flawed Science' made by critics (read the majority of residents in the Murray Darling Basin) in regard to the technical data presented in Parts I and II of the Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan.

It is timely and absolutely necessary for the Murray Darling Basin Authority and its Parliamentary Master to halt this juggernaut and start afresh, this time engaging the entire community openly and honestly.

It is patently obvious that the Water Act of 2007 must be comprehensively examined and amended in the best interests of the Murray Darling Basin environment and all of its residents including humans.

Consideration must be given to the irreversible damage inflicted upon communities in regard to the social, economic and environmental impact as a consequence of the proposed Plan in its present form.

The majority of farmers and residents in rural communities have long demonstrated their commitment to preserving and enhancing the natural environment for as long as they have occupied these lands.

The legal, moral and social obligations of Government:

The Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan as presented today, cannot and will not function to the benefit of all the living creatures in the Murray Darling Basin.

What it will do if implemented in its present form, is significantly increase our refugee population.

A refugee by definition, is a person who is forced to leave their homeland or place of birth as a consequence of conflict such as war, famine, persecution, natural disaster or economic hardship.

In the event the Murray Darling Basin Plan as it exists is implemented, every resident of the Murray Darling Basin will qualify for Economic Hardship Refugee status.

It is not likely that the Murray Darling Basin Association or its Parliamentary Master have taken this into account.

Australians can consider the prospect of forever buying imported food of dubious quality and suspect origin at uncontrollable prices.

A serious Human Rights issue also presents as a consequence of the Murray Darling Basin Plan being inflicted upon the populace.

Taking up to 50% of all water from communities denies them the Basic Human Right of sustaining their communities, earning a living, and retaining the freedom to live and work where they choose.

Conclusion:

The Board, Management and Staff of the West Corugan Private Irrigation District extend an invitation to the Murray Darling Basin Authority to consult with any and all members to assist in the development and implementation of a single Murray Darling Basin Plan that addresses all of the relevant issues with a measure of balance and sense of fairness to realise all of the triple bottom line objectives.

No one would argue that every Australian has a responsibility to protect our natural environment as much as reasonably possible.

Future management of our water resources and the distribution of that common wealth must take into consideration the present and future needs of all stakeholders who have invested generations in growing sustainable productive communities which underpin the success of the Murray Darling Basin as the major food producer in Australia.

In addition the Murray Darling Basin enjoys a reputation nationally and internationally as a popular leisure destination catering to a diversity of interests.

One act of human folly borne of ignorance and obstinance will inflict a measure of pain on future generations of Australians to an extent it cannot be accurately quantified.

We must never allow that to occur.

Mike Duncan
General Manager

16 December 2010