



Pure
TOWONG
SHIRE COUNCIL

Located at the
Pure
end of the Murray

Enquiries: J. Phelps (JP/ds)
File: 07/01/0010

December 14, 2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Management of the Murray-Darling Basin and the Murray Darling Basin Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission in relation to the management of the Murray-Darling Basin and the development and implementation of the Basin Plan.

Towong Shire is situated at the headwaters of the Murray River and agriculture is the cornerstone of Towong Shire's economy. The Murray River forms the northern and eastern boundaries of the municipality and the Mitta Mitta River traverses the south-western side of the municipality. The whole of the Towong Shire is a declared water supply catchment, with Dartmouth Dam and Lake Hume located within the Shire.

The North East Region plays a vital role in providing water resources for south-eastern Australia. Although it comprises only 2% of the geographic area of the Murray-Darling basin, the region's river basins contribute 38% of the total water in the Murray-Darling Basin system.

Dairying and beef grazing are the main agricultural pursuits within our Shire and water is a critical input. In recent times the declining reliability of irrigation water allocations has placed stress on dairy enterprises within our municipality. These enterprises are also likely to be impacted by diminished stream flows and the commensurate reductions in seasonal pasture irrigations associated with projected climate change forecasts. Council is very concerned about the negative impact the scenarios contained within the guide may have on our Shire as well as our partner municipalities in the North East, particularly in terms of food production and regional development.

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Council is particularly concerned at the lack of consideration that has been given to the social and economic impacts of the scenarios proposed in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan Guide.

In terms of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan Guide there are a number of areas where we believe clarification is required:

1. Specific information in relation to the rivers within Towong Shire

As acknowledged in the guide, the Mitta Mitta River and the Upper Murray above Lake Hume are relatively healthy rivers, rivers which are providing water to less healthy river systems and systems that are over-allocated.

However, the lack of specific information within the guide relative to the rivers within our municipality means that we are unable to form an argument, backed by specific measurable data and research information, for retaining water in our municipality.

Accordingly we require from the MDBA, specific and up-to-date data and information on the rivers within our municipality.

The few irrigators that we have in our Shire use a very small amount of water in the terms of the whole basin and we have put significant effort into Council led projects to further reduce the amount of water used by our farmers, projects such as 'MyFarm' and 'Grazing the Hills'. With further Federal and State grant funding to assist our farmers to pursue innovative, sustainable solutions we believe greater water savings can be achieved along with improvements to water quality, thereby making upper catchment farmers the benchmark for productivity per megalitre of water throughout the Murray-Darling Basin.

2. Utilisation of water closer to its source

Council is strongly of the view that the benefits and efficiencies of using water closest to the source have not been sufficiently considered and recognised within the Guide. We hope the MDBA can see the logic of using water closest to its source and actively attempt to influence the States to implement consistent legislation across the Murray-Darling Basin for the rights of farmers to utilise a small percentage of water that falls on their land.

We believe the loss of water through conveyancing (eg: to deliver one megalitre of water to Mildura from Lake Hume requires the release of 3 megalitres) provides a significant argument for the utilisation of water closer to the source.

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3. Impact on right to harvest water

We require clarification for our farmers who have licensed farm dams that are unregulated, whether SDLs will affect their right to harvest water.

4. Research and development

The guide does not clearly recommend that funding be allocated for research and development in regions that will be affected by the changes to SDLs.

Research and development needs to be coordinated across all agricultural industries to develop a collaborative approach to not only benefit the Murray-Darling Basin but also agriculture throughout Australia. An ongoing Federal government commitment is required for Australia to be once again a leader in agricultural research and development.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make this submission. Council would like to speak to its submission should the opportunity be available.

Please do not hesitate to contact me () for further information.

Yours sincerely

JULIANA PHELPS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER