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myrtleford
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY INC



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The Myrtleford Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc would like to express concern in relation to the MDBA Guide to the Proposed Plan.

The guide refers to the socio-economic impact to the whole MDBA as effecting 800 jobs. The Authority has accepted that maybe the guide got the numbers wrong. We believe that in the Ovens Region only – if the guide became the draft plan and then adopted there would be more than 800 jobs lost in our region alone.

Myrtleford is a small country town within the Ovens Basin and is the largest town in the Alpine Shire. Myrtleford is often referred to as the commercial hub and relies heavily on the agricultural sector to support small business and our community.

The guide as we read it has the potential to halt irrigation activity in our region due to the proposed cuts identified for the Ovens region to meet the Sustainable Diversions Limit. The apparent lack of understanding of how a high rainfall area combined with an unregulated river and tributary system is used for diversions is demonstrated through the proposed SDL.

Harrietteville, Bright- Wandiligong, Porepunkah and Myrtleford urban water supplies are provided through high winter flows with minor storages utilized in summer during times of low flows. North East Water our urban water authority is required to have passing flows for the environment which are part of their licence to extract water. (Bulk Water Entitlements) The guide is unclear as to how township extractions are accounted for.

Diversions for irrigation are only partially used by the agricultural sector. We often refer to irrigation licences as insurance for when it doesn't rain and crops require water. There is a high proportion of unused entitlements due to the nature of the region.

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Goulburn Murray Water – our local authority who licence diversions for irrigation and stock and domestic clearly show that less than 40% of licences are actually used. The highest use ever recorded in the past 20 years was 59% which has been documented in the Proposed Upper Ovens Streamflow Management Plan.

Whatever processes, systems or models were used within the development of the plan do not have an equitable outcome across the basin.

For many years tobacco growing was the main agricultural industry around Myrtleford, contributing \$28 million each year at the farm gate and \$90 million to the regional economy. The closure of the tobacco industry in late 2006 brought to an end over 150 years of tobacco crop production in the region when the growers accepted a financial package from tobacco manufacturers and the Australian Government to terminate production.

As a result, a major regional land use and social restructure is now taking place as many former tobacco growers seek alternate primary industry pursuits that are sustainable, profitable and suited to the climate characteristics of the area.

Located at the confluence of the Ovens and Buffalo Rivers, the fertile soils, an elevation of 210m above sea level and an average annual rainfall of 887mm means Myrtleford is ideally suited to intensive agriculture.

Today, timber plantations, hops and beef cattle production remain important agricultural industries to Myrtleford.

Many former tobacco farms are now producing high quality lucerne and a small number have ventured into permanent plantings of berries and nuts.

Wine-grape production has expanded and crops such as walnuts, chestnuts and cherries have small but significant regional plantings. Boutique wineries now compliment Myrtleford's larger established wineries and the availability of fresh produce has encouraged people to open quality restaurants and bistros.

The Ovens system is well documented to already providing over 98% of its total flow to the Murray river which thereafter is regulated and has a degree of control in relation to management of flows.

This guide to the proposed plan has created uncertainty about the future of agriculture in the region and we would encourage the MDBA to work with our local community to come up with practical solutions that improve environmental flows without dissipating agriculture in our region.

Yours faithfully

Frank Ivone
President.