

Submission to Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee on integrity of the water market in the Murray-Darling Basin

I am writing as an individual based in Sydney but who travels frequently in western NSW for leisure purposes, camping and bird watching, and who has a great affection and concern for the future of rural areas of the state. My contact details are provided at the end of this submission.

1. Allegations of theft and corruption There seems to be substantial evidence of theft and corruption occurring in the management of water resources. This distresses me as I looked to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan to resolve long-standing problems of catchment health. There cannot be viable communities along the river system if water allocations continue to be abused. We need to promote a culture of water as a precious and finite resource so that we do not destroy the Murray-Darling Basin for future generations.

Those irrigators who are not complying with the Plan must be prosecuted, including losing their allocation if they continue non-compliance. Similarly, public officials who have acted in a corrupt manner rather than upholding the letter and spirit of the Basin Plan should be removed from their positions and brought to trial.

2. Use of Commonwealth-owned environmental water for irrigation purposes I feel strongly that environmental water, which has been bought back from irrigators with public money, should be used for the purposes for which it was intended. The Basin Plan is not overly generous with its environmental allocation. In fact experts regard it as a minimum amount necessary to assist the long term improvement of the Murray-Darling. While this may be difficult for rural businesses to accept, and unpalatable for politicians, it does not alter the fact that we have a responsibility to nurture the river system and that if we do not do that effectively the ramifications are unthinkable – more algal blooms, collapsing ecosystems, ultimately a dead landscape which does not support rural communities or populations towards the end of the catchment.

Some possible solutions to reduce irrigation needs are: reduction in cultivation of water-hungry crops which are by definition not appropriate in a dry landscape; research to reduce water needs of particular crops; piping of water to reduce evaporation in open dams and irrigation channels; more efficient irrigation practices generally. I understand that initiatives are in progress under the Basin Plan but increased emphasis needs to be made as the progress to date seems to be inadequate.