

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications

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Submission to Inquiry into the Water Amendment (Restoring our Rivers) Bill 2023

As a community member of the Coorong and Lakes and a Healthy Rivers Ambassador, I am supportive of the bill to strengthen the Water Act 2007 and remove the cap on water buy backs, ensuring the delivery of the 450GL of up water to be delivered for the benefit of all the river communities as quickly as possible and in full.

I have long advocated for this and for much of what is now being proposed and feel this is a step in the right direction.

It concerns me that consecutive governments seem to bend to the big end of town over and above the basin communities and their needs, those of the traditional owners and that of the Flora, Fauna, and the Murray Darling Basin as a whole. That there has been very little achieved since 2012 relative to the money that has been spent. While some ecological targets have been met the great majority have not.

We are all very aware that the 3200GL is not nearly enough to have a healthy thriving Basin, yet that is what is in the plan and in 11yrs we have not gotten anywhere near that figure.

We are heading I feel for a catastrophic outcome that unless we make the decision, to do what is necessary to ensure protection of our most important asset water security, we will not be able to provide our future generations with the same life that we have had the privilege of having. I want my grandchildren to be able to turn on a tap and have access to safe clean drinking water.

There is no financial gain for anyone if we let the basin die and I really don't believe it can wait another 2-3 years. We must act now.

Look at what has happened over the last decade, big multi-nationals have opened parcels of land never viable or used for water intensive pursuits, but with the uncoupling of land and the water market it has paved the way for permeant plantings in areas crops and large-scale cotton and stock. This issue needs to be addressed. Building and using areas known to be flood plains causing constraints also needs to be addressed. Common sense is nowhere to be found, just profit and profit but what about the loss.

I look out on our lake and while it is reasonably healthy at present, I wonder how long. **I have attached photos as a reminder to this committee of what was considered a consequence of the Millenium Drought but, much was due to over extraction.** We lost over half our population, due to lack of water, cows were sent off to slaughter and nearly all our dairy industry shut down. Many other primary producers changed their practices, from pivot to dry land and government talked of sending in bottled water for ours and many other towns. I never thought I would see anything like it again in my lifetime, but now I fear with the changing climate it is all to near again.

- Committing and speeding up the process to remove constraints is an issue that is of concern and may need to be remedied by means of easements and compulsory acquisition, better roads, and bridge improvements etc. To guarantee effective delivery of environmental water.
- The inclusion of transitional assistance funding to help communities a just to change is important and fully supported, the sale of water is not the single cause of social and economic impacts in the basin there are many factors that are contributing to regional decline including a lack of government will to invest in regional areas and their preference for metropolitan projects.
- Basin Plan projects require more regulations with more accountability and reporting requirements. That there is some form of penalties for failure to deliver projects and that no additional extensions are given to deadline of December 2026. It has been 10 years and many of the offset projects will not be delivered; the states do not deserve more time in

this area. That SDLAM projects that are deemed to not meet the required delivery should be scrapped and no further projects should be proposed. I am pleased to see that the Menindee Lakes project has been scrapped which was to account for 104GL of the SDLAM, this now should be purchased via buy backs. There needs to be reviews on Menindee Lakes management that the reserve of 195GL is not enough to prevent further fish, kills, black water or algal blooms and that things need to be changed around the management sharing rules. There must be clear accounting of the 605GL offset for the SDLAM projects and transparency on how the shortfall will be recovered. There should also be scrutiny around the toolkit measures and 70GL. Until supply measure projects are operational and environmental outcomes proved, the environment must have access to the equivalent volume of water. The environmentally sustainable level of take seems to be overlooked here.

- There needs to be assurances that First Nations Peoples have access to and ownership of water and are included in the decision – making process. Integration of Aboriginal water planning proposals into existing instruments, supporting Traditional Owners in design and delivery of programmes.
- Widening the powers of the Inspector- General and providing him with resources and independence is supported.
- The inclusion of measures aimed at improving the transparency, integrity and accountability of the water market, based on recommendations from the Water Market Reform Roadmap from October 2022 is welcomed. The government must restrict trade when it impacts water quality and cultural heritage. Coordinate a uniformed water register, negotiate for intergovernmental agreement on market reforms and examine transparency within irrigation schemes, potential insider trading etc.
- It is important that we have an independent audit of the environmental water portfolio. This should look at the reliability of water recovered on

paper. There should be greater scrutiny on what is real water. This is an opaque area with differing types of water.

- Consideration of the impact of climate change must be included in the update in water requirements. Reduced inflows, assessing the water in the system and include connectivity under different climate conditions, The government's own science (CSIRO Storylines) says climate change will reduce rainfall in the Basin by up to 20% and reduce mean annual water inflows by 20-50% a 20% reduction will mean a dead river, we need transparency and commitment.
- While I am very supportive of much of this bill, I am also very aware of the lack of willingness of many of the states and their continued undermining of the plan and their propensity to drag things out. So, I wonder is this just another way for the big end of town to continue to delay and a convenient way of not having to forfeit irrigation water back to the environment as set out in the 5% rules of the SDL adjustment as I believe only about 2GL has been found to date.

I would be happy to provide further information if.

Sincerely

Mrs Rosa M Hillam

Healthy Rivers Ambassador

River Fellow



August 2009 Lake Albert



August 2009 Lake Albert



August 2009 Lake Albert



August 2009 Lake Albert Carpe removal

August 2009 Lake Albert Carpe removal



August 2009 Lake Albert Carpe removal



27th January 2010 Lake Albert



27th January 2010 Lake Albert



Lake Albert January 27th 2010 they say the eye can see seven kilometres so I wonder the distance of the camera Lense as for as far as I could see there were just puddles on our lake