

22-11-2010- Submission to Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

Donald W Ward
22nd November 2010

Sir, I am prompted to write because of my alarm at some of the misconceptions and downright lies in the current so called debate about the Murray Darling Basin. Ie. Some of the Environmental advocates are casting doubt on the Farming practices of Food Producers.

The leading edge methods used by some of our Farmers are mind boggling in their Science and productivity. Unfortunately, this methodology is very expensive and leaves the users very exposed to the vagaries of the weather, and market place, let alone the whims of bureaucracies, politicians and so called opinion leaders.

This exposure leaves some of our best (mainly young) farmers being very vulnerable to economic downturns like the recent GFC as well as the problems caused by the recent severe drought (which is far from finished with us). Debt problems for some of these farmers have a long way to go before their final solution.

This misinformation takes me back to the days of the Hawke Government when the then Minister for Agriculture was talking about Australia's Dairy Industry "living in the days of the horse and cart". The said Minister was taken to some of our Dairying areas to be shown that from paddock to plate, the Dairy Industry was using leading edge technology.

This leading edge technology is what is required for savings to provide water "for the environment". The Commonwealth has allocated large amounts of money for infrastructure and on farm improvements. I am yet to see much evidence that this money is being spent as allocated, the only spending we hear about is for buy water from "willing sellers", a term which I find offensive, as many of these "willing sellers" are often desperate sellers, forced into selling by pressure from Financial Institutions. Often these sales leave farmers with unviable blocks, too small to operate at a profit without water.

Another problem I see is the reduction of research into improvements in agricultural practice. We have the Productivity Commission recommending large decreases in spending on Research, less money from Farmer Levies due to the ten year drought, the sale of Research stations and Plant Breeding facilities by State Governments. All of these operations have the potential to deliver on farm savings, which have the potential to deliver improvements in water utilization.

Farmers will be expected to increase food production to feed a world where there are diminishing resources of land and water for the production of said food. To think that Governments, at the behest of the electorate, who in turn are misled by sections of Academia and the Press, are quite prepared to pillage these resources beggars belief.

The social engineering we are faced with in the efforts of people, many of whom, I dare say, have never been west of the divide is very frightening, where whole towns, already devastated by ten years of drought are going to have to gather what meagre resources they have left and fight to hold on to their farms, businesses and towns. These people often have no idea, where their food comes from. (I wonder if they really care.)

These circumstances are what gave rise to the formation of Rural Financial Counseling Services during the 1980s, when we saw the terrible sights on our nightly TV news of farmers being dragged off their farms by Police and Bailiffs acting on behalf of Banks and Financial Institutions.

Now, as then, we will be losing some of our very best young farmers, who will be very employable almost anywhere outside of Agriculture. But we need them here.

Donald W Ward.