

3 June 2020

Dear Senator Brockman,

I am writing in response to recent evidence given by Mr Mick Keelty to the Senate Committee on the Multi-Jurisdictional Management and Execution of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan on 12 May 2020. I wish to address two matters; Mr Keelty's response to a question about the contribution of the Darling to the Murray, and his claim to have engaged in dialogue with me.

Below is an excerpt from Hansard:

Senator DAVEY: *This flows on from questions that have been asked about the connection between the Lower Darling. It all relates; it's all an interconnected basin. In your report, on page 13, you mentioned that the Lower Darling historically only contributed an average of eight per cent of water available in the Murray River system. I have seen a whole range of numbers on what the Lower Darling has contributed. Significantly, some of the constituents in my region have relied a lot on a report—and there was a bit of press about the report—by Maryanne Slattery, who then worked for the Australia Institute. She said it was once 39 per cent. Is there any reason why there's such a discrepancy as to numbers and opinions on how much the Lower Darling actually contributes to the Murray River flows? That has an impact on what is flowing, potentially, to Lake Victoria or South Australia.*

Mr Keelty: *You've picked up on a discrepancy—well, not a discrepancy, but a failing of mine—in the report. I should have sourced that eight per cent quote. I'll go back and do that. I'm aware of the work of Ms Slattery. I have found it difficult to reconcile a lot of her figures, I have to say. I'm not criticising her as a person, but I do have trouble in reconciling a lot of her assertions. I'll undertake to the committee to give you the source of that eight per cent. It's a deficiency on my part; I apologise.*

Senator PATRICK: *You talked briefly about Maryanne Slattery: she strikes me as a person who has spent a lot of time around the river, and she has an accounting background. She actually stirs the pot quite well—if that were a measure against which you were to judge her performance, she does a great job. But with some of the things you said there: have you ever met Maryanne?*

Mr Keelty: *Yes, I have.*

Senator PATRICK: *So you've engaged in dialogue with her—I think that's a helpful thing.*

Mr Keelty: *Absolutely. With my comments made earlier: there are a lot of people who are extremely passionate about this. There are a lot of people who think that they have the right data. It's a complex area and, clearly, there are people who will focus on what they think. Of course, some of this is underlined by mistrust of government and mistrust of government agencies too, which is—*

Senator PATRICK: *Which is due to a lack of transparency.*

Mr Keelty: *I don't think I'm at liberty to ignore anybody.*

Mr Keelty's response that he has met me and 'absolutely' 'engaged in dialogue' with me is untrue. I have never met Mr Keelty. I have never spoken with him on the phone or had any written correspondence with him.

In early February 2020 I met with four of Mr Keelty's staff for a meeting that lasted one hour. At no time did I meet or see Mr Keelty. I offered further assistance to Mr Keelty's staff on any matters relating to water. To date, they have not accepted this offer.

Mr Keelty's staff asked about the Darling River's 39% contribution to South Australia's regulated entitlement, as raised by Senator Davey in the recent hearing quoted above. I explained the background of this figure and the appropriate reference document.

Contrary to the claim of Senator Davey and Mr Keelty, the 39% estimate of the contribution from the Darling into the Murray is not an assertion or a calculation by me or colleagues at The Australia Institute. The figure is from a report published by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority in 2012. The link to the report is:

<https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/archived/proposed/EWR-Lower-Darling-River-System.pdf>

The key quote is on page 8:

The Menindee Lakes scheme delivers water to South Australia to meet part of its annual entitlement (39% on average).

The reports I co-authored at The Australia Institute were fully referenced, including attributing the 39% estimate to the MDBA's document. Mr Keelty's office had been made aware of this source well in advance of the hearing quoted above.

I respectfully request that the record be corrected in relation to these matters. Could you please communicate these corrections to the rest of the Committee at the next hearing or other earlier opportunity. I would be happy to assist the Committee in relation to these or any other matters.

Regards,

Maryanne Slattery

Director

Slattery & Johnson