

Submission No 142. SC

Nov. 30th 2010

The Chairman,
House of Representatives Standing Committee
of Regional Australia.

P.O. Box 6021

CANBERRA, ACT. 2600.

Sir,

I enclose my submission to the
Standing Committee who are enquiring
into the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

I believe the closing date for sub-
missions has been revised to Dec. 17th
2010.

I also enclose a SA River Communities
leaflet.

Yours faithfully
Mrs P. J. Hudson.

PAGE 1

SUBMISSION FOR PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

ENQUIRY (Monday 20 December 2010)

DATE: November

TO: HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES Standing Committee
of Regional AUSTRALIA.

P.O. Box 6021

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT. 2600

FROM: MRS. P.J. HUDSON Irrigator for 45 years
Sunlands Irrigation Scheme

TOPIC: MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN ENQUIRY
New Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDL)
(Socio-economic impact on regional communities)
Important Considerations:

IMPORTANT
CONSIDERATIONS

- The direct and indirect impact of the Proposed Basin Plan on regional communities, including agricultural industries, local business activity and community wellbeing;
- Options for water-saving measures or water return on a region-by-region basis with consideration given to an analysis of actual usage versus licence entitlement over the preceding fifteen years
- The role of governments, the agricultural industry and the research sector in developing and delivering infrastructure and technologies aimed at supporting water efficiency within the Murray-Darling Basin.

SUMMARY: Personal sustainability of growers and repercussions on local communities of Committee's final adjudication.

growers {
— impact of SDL on an already water-wise systems
— current efficiencies allow minimal further reductions.

secondary industry {
— loss of supportive secondary — packing, processing, marketing, freight. Increased unemployment

Retail: — closure of retail and service businesses.
Increased sales of real estate — properties
Loss of Community Population — residences

COMMITTEE ENQUIRY (cont.)SUMMARY I
(cont.)WATER SAVING OPTIONS

2. South Aust. Riverland has history of prudent and responsible water management - brief outline over past 40 years. Modern infrastructure; water accountability; grower initiative to upgrade at own cost.

ROLE OF STATE AND FEDERAL GOVT.

3. Need for combined approach by basin irrigators, State and Federal Governments.

8 INDUSTRY :

Productive change will only be achieved by honest appraisal of regions, identification of areas where upgrading is essential and must be addressed. It will involve high-cost, long-term and closely monitored authority control. Recent hasty, unmonitored, unregulated Govt. sponsored community "packages" have resulted in over-cost and un-safe construction. It needs to ensure prudent value for taxpayer investment

SPECIFIC REFERENCES - EXPANSION

1

DIRECT IMPACT ON GROWERS

Effects of recent drought and extended water allocation restrictions:-

- grubbing of some plantings to better use water available; uncertainty of replanting
- abandonment of part or whole properties
- need to purchase water at escalated cost
- increased borrowings from banks; loss of contracts
- constant awareness of possible loss of livelihood
- impact of global crisis, diminished returns, loss of self-esteem, depression, even suicides, and confidence,

1

COMMITTEE ENQUIRY (cont.)INDIRECT

Closure (failure) of secondary businesses:-

IMPACTS ON
COMMUNITIES

- Packing sheds, processing plants, factories, freight carriers - serious losses of employment

- Closure of retail services with more unemployment

This feature of Riverland towns is very evident and would be replicated in all MDB districts

- Extensive sale of properties and residences

This is very evident through "For Sale" advertisements in regional local papers.

If the imposition of continuing heavy water restrictions in the S.A. Riverland is maintained it will accelerate this distressing decline.

Results will be:

- heavier loss of regional Australian food production with significant employment/welfare reliance associations

- increased reliance on imported food and further loss of export earnings.

DEEPCONCERN

Australia is becoming "the quarry of the world" Our valuable resources; minerals, natural gas, coal, Uranium, pastoral and arable land, water, farms, timber are all being lost to opportunistic foreign buyers at "basic extraction" prices.

Sound economic principles teach that best returns accrue from "value adding". We are sacrificing national resources and long-term security for immediate \$ gain. Can Australians buy land and resources in China??

MDB ENQUIRY: (cont.)DEEP CONCERN

(cont.)

The current government policy seems to be that unless a property / resource is valued above \$2.3 m. it is not even notifiable to any national authority.

- * ALL land and resource transactions to foreign ownership should be recorded on a National Register.

S.A. RIVERLANDREGIONALWATER HISTORY

2.

A critical factor in the MDB plan's recommendations for SDL must take into consideration the existing status of all districts.

- Some districts have upgraded efficient water-use practices.
- Others operate outdated, inefficient systems that are wasteful and must be addressed.

SA. RiverlandSpecificallySunlandsIrrigationSchemeAlso GoldenHeights Scheme

Established late 1950 → 1960. Combined State Govt. and local authorities initiative

- Channels discontinued
- Modern pumping stations for water extraction constructed - network of below-ground pipelines established to surveyed horticultural properties. Water distributed by overhead sprinklers
- Inefficient and wasteful over-head sprinklers replaced by low-throw under-tree or drip systems
- A water cap has applied in SA. since the 1960s
- Also State govt. has placed a ban on further development on land within 5 kilometres of River.

ENQUIRY - M.D. BASIN PLAN (con.)

2.

S.A. REGIONAL HISTORY

- Establishment of Qualco/Sunlands Salt Interception Scheme in 2001 (S.A. Govt. Initiative) to divert saline re-entry into the River. Growers pay regular levy towards operational expense.
- Replacement of manually operated water valves to fully automatic operation from office. This records all water use and identifies water leakage/loss. All water extraction is metered.
- currently the scheme is being computerised.

* This ongoing upgrading means that in S.A. we have little flexibility to achieve "significant water efficiencies" without threatening the sustainability of our plantings. The inefficient, even irresponsible, water-use areas need to be identified and encouraged? coerced? into upgrading outmoded, wasteful systems.

[It is also expedient to keep in mind that irrigators are not the only water-users who extract water from the M.D.B.]

EASTERN STATES WATER USE & IRRIGATION SYSTEMS.

The eastern states still rely heavily on open earth channels. I understand there are 26,000 Kilometres still in use in New South Wales. Recent Federal Funding to Victoria was used to lay plastic sheeting at base of earth channels - to reduce seepage. What a band-aid solution!

SOLUTION

The only logical, long-term and effective approach must involve co-operative effort by irrigators in all states, State Governments and Federal Govt. Unless we do, the whole M.D.B will collapse and be lost to us all. - a National calamity!

PAGE 6. SUBMISSION FOR PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ENQUIRY (cont.)

3.

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

(a)

First, Identify the areas/districts where major water savings can be achieved - where water use is least effective: upgrade must deliver advantages to all concerned.

(b)

BASIC

CONCEPT

Grower groups, with State Govt. support only, could not currently fund the upgrades. It would need Federal Govt. approval and funding with clearly stated objectives, advantages and commitment by all parties.

DEVELOP - MENT

(c)

The scheme(s) should be attempted district by district to allow for specific regional variations. It should be strictly monitored as to cost and progress of infrastructure and problem solution. Initial planning must be based on expert advice from financial, engineering and construction specialists.

Progressing district by district allows for Federal Govt. funding on a project by project basis and on a more manageable ^{cost} scale. It also allows for close monitoring and evaluation of each project and possible future modification.

ADVANTAGES

(d)

Perceived advantages (and commitments)

Growers should be offered an up-front grant based on property size and location - it must provide initial incentive and provide foreseeable benefit, but not be excessive. It is taxpayer funded.

3. COMMITTEE ENQUIRY. (Cont.)

ADVANTAGES

(d) A further percentage (or fixed specific amount) of the outlay for the cost of upgrade; again relevant to the size of property, should be on a long-term, non-interest-bearing-loan basis repayable to the Federal Government over perhaps 10 years, in annual instalments.

* The water saved by achieving greater irrigation efficiency must revert to the Federal Government.
The grower would receive a fair water allocation reassessment relative to property size.
The State Government would benefit by more secure and efficient regional irrigation and productivity and improved community stability.

CAUTIONS:

- (a) In-built safeguards must provide redress in the event that any party to the agreed scheme reneges on their commitment—a legal precaution
- (b) Being a long-term initiative it would be very unjust if upgrading was carried out in particular states but was then abandoned because of cost factors. Clearly greatest areas of inefficiency are prime objectives for upgrade but not necessarily in the same MDB region.
- (c) Compulsory water metering should apply everywhere and is open to abuse. All MDBasin water extraction should be subject to accurate metering.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I wish you clear thinking and good outcomes from your deliberations. It is of national importance.

Yours faithfully
(Mrs) P J Hudson

**South Australian
River Communities**

**Agreed Principles
for the
Murray Darling Basin Plan
and
Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs)**

- *The need for a national approach to the Murray Darling Basin Plan.*
- *The need for a healthy river system.*
- *Federal Government water programs to be integrated with the Murray Darling Basin Plan and the development of SDLs.*
- *Flexibility in moving funds between infrastructure programs that recover water and water buy back.*
- *Support provided for those irrigators who remain.*
- *Water entitlements and reliability are not reduced.*
- *Full and fair compensation for compulsory acquisition.*
- *Calculation of the SDL for SA incorporates and rewards historically responsible behaviour.*
- *Adequate transitional time for any adjustment.*
- *SA irrigators are not to be disadvantaged under SDLs relative to other SA water users.*

This group includes representatives from the Almond Board of Australia, Citrus Growers of South Australia, SA Citrus Industry Development Board, SA Fresh Fruit Growers Association, Riverland Winegrape Growers Association, South Australian Murray Irrigators, Central Irrigation Trust, Renmark Irrigation Trust, Golden Heights and Sunlands Irrigation Trusts, Lower Murray Irrigation Association and Riverland Local Government Forum.