

PATRICK HAYES

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Dear MR TONY WINDSOR M.P.

**My concern for the future of rural communities under the Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan**

I am concerned for the future of rural Australians, for agriculture, food security as well as the environment. I am affected by what occurs in the Murray Darling Basin. I have received information regarding the "Murray Darling Basin Guide to the proposed Basin Plan" (The Plan) which gives me no confidence in "The Plan" or the processes that have been undertaken in the preparation of "The Plan".

In an effort to mitigate the damage already inflicted on residents of the Murray Darling Basin and lift the blanket of uncertain financial security and investment which has been cast over the region, I ask that until all of the enquiries into "The Plan" are finalised and the findings made public:

1. "The Plan" be precluded from consideration immediately.
2. The Hon. Tony Burke – Minister for Water confirms the "Sustainable Diversion Limit Figures" referenced in that guide are to be reviewed and those put forward in "The Plan" are no longer up for consideration.

I believe that currently, the *Water Act* does not address the triple-bottom line, which is outlined by the National Water Initiative, the basis of the *Act*. It is heavily weighted in favour of the environment, and a true balance between the environment, economy and social aspects needs to be attained. To this end I ask:

3. The *Water Act 2007* is reviewed and amendments made, with a view to making it more fair and equitable to all communities in the Murray Darling Basin, and compliant with the National Water Initiatives' triple-bottom line approach, treating the social, economic and environmental aspects of the Basin equally.

I ask that the inquiries currently being held and any future "Plans" take into consideration the following factors:

- The socio-economic factors that will affect rural communities brought about by any plan once adopted;
- Water that has already been taken or purchased from the MDB – for example the National Water Initiative, Water for Rivers, State Government purchases and the Living Murray initiative, amongst others;
- The Parliamentary and Senate inquiries should look at water management from a holistic perspective, not simply water for the environment;
- Initiatives beyond taking water from food production should be fully investigated; for example, upgrades of depression era water infrastructure, environmental efficiencies programs, on-farm efficiency projects, storm water reclamation, the list is long and the studies are exhaustive;
- The significance of domestic food security and the future needs for food;
- The wellbeing and continuation of one of Australia's major export industries;
- The Governance of the environmental water that is "saved";
- That any Government money that is allocated as recompense goes to infrastructure and socio-economic development, before going to water buy backs, to ensure that the best outcomes for rural communities can be met.

The inquiries should also take into consideration the following scenarios:

- Food security contingency plans, should the production of locally produced food be affected by more than 20%
- Contingency plan for an influx of people to the cities from rural areas brought about by substantial loss of employment opportunities in rural areas

I believe an inquiry led by an organisation, labelled an "independent commission" undertaking an "independent study", should be truly independent, I therefore request that:

- All advertising undertaken by the Commonwealth Department of Water, on behalf of the MDBA, be stopped immediately;
- That all "best available" information used by the MDBA have a requirement to be peer reviewed; and
- I also demand that the "local knowledge" of rural communities, is actively sought and engaged across all matters of the Basin Plan, to deliver an outcome that considers all aspects of the issues, to deliver a truly independent report.

We elect our Politicians with the expectation that they will do what is right for ALL Australians. Your representation to the Hon Tony Burke MP, Federal Minister of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, on my behalf, would be greatly appreciated.

I look forward to receiving your and Minister Burke's responses.

Yours sincerely,

Your constituent, *PATRICK HAYES*

*PS DEAR TONY,*

*I WOULD LIKE TO LET YOU KNOW THAT IN THE RECENT BAD RUN OF DROUGHT YEARS US NSW MURRAY IRRIGATORS WERE NOT USEING WATER THAT SHOULD HAVE WENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT BECAUSE WE GOT YEARS WITH ZERO WATER ALLOCATIONS.*

*THE SIMPLE FACT IS IF IT DOES NOT RAIN UP IN THE CATCHMENT THERE IS VERY LITTLE WATER FOR ANYTHING.*

*WHEN THERE IS GOOD RAIN IN THE CATCHMENT LIKE 2010 THERE IS PLENTY OF WATER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND IRRIGATION.*

*YOURS SINCERELY*

# Summary of the FACTS

In the media recently you may have noticed the "Guide to the Murray Basin Plan" (MDBP) has been released. If this plan is adopted there will be widespread decimation of communities in the basin. This is not an understatement. We need your help to have this plan rejected.

The Murray Darling Basin Plan has been marketed as securing water with the aim of improving the environment. Nice idea; however, if too much water is no longer available for agriculture, there will be an immediate impact on Australia's ability to produce its food. Flow on impacts affects all Australians, not just farmers.

Many in regional Australia see the plan as politicians and environmental groups reacting to a drought!

## Why should this issue be important to you?

- Around 40% of Australia's national agriculture production comes from the Murray Darling food bowl.
- Australia's population is increasing, it follows we need to increase our food production.
- Decreased food production coupled with increased cost of production will certainly result in you paying more for your food.
- Overseas, countries are seeking to secure future food supplies while Australia is considering reducing its food production.

## Why don't we just import our food?

- Economics – A healthy economy relies on a multitude of diverse exports.
- Food quality - Not all countries have the same stringent production regulations Australia does.
- Food security is important. We cannot be reliant on imports. *(Did you know that establishment of the rice industry in Australia was deemed necessary after we found ourselves at war with our supplier!)*

## What's the problem with a "bit" less water in the basin?

- Protecting the environment's share of water was addressed in new water sharing plans in the Basin under the National Water Initiative enacted since 2004 – the drought has meant the environmental benefits of these plans hasn't even been tested – now the Government has moved the goal posts, under a new policy – the Murray Darling Basin Plan.
- The Murray Darling Basin Authority's (MDBA) own guide to the new Basin Plan indicates that the environment currently has 58% of the share of the Basin's water under existing plans and programs.
- The Government has already purchased 17-18% of our region's water entitlements to be used for the environment.
- In Deniliquin, the estimated volume of water leaving the region will re-create a permanent drought forever. This is not just a bit less water.
- Losses such as these will make many farms in the basin unviable. Irrigation is essential in undertaking intensive agriculture, which plays an enormous part in providing enough food for Australians as well as export.

## What does this mean for the people living in the affected areas?

- The NSW Central Murray Region has a population of around 33,000 people.
- Around 90% of businesses in the region are directly reliant on irrigated agriculture and there are no support packages for affected businesses.
- Food production is the main industry in regional Australia; Governments cannot simply claim new industries can replace it.
- More people will have to leave town, possibly heading to the already burgeoning cities seeking employment. They take their families, their money and their skills with them which impacts adversely on the local economy. The drought has already provided evidence of this - decreased school enrolments, closing of businesses, falling house prices and downgrading of public services are just a few of the issues we have already had to deal with. The towns will not be able to deal with further cuts.
- Overnight with the release of this plan an "enormous blanket of financial uncertainty" was thrown over all businesses, assets and people of the region still struggling with the affects of drought. People who were just beginning to drag themselves out of the depression associated with the Millennium Drought

were gutted by the "Plan". At a public meeting recently, one farmer said what many other people at the meeting were thinking... "It is hard to believe that your own Government would do this to you."

## **Some of the reasons we have no faith in the Murray Darling Basin Plan:**

### **Lack of true consultation with stakeholders**

- The MDBC had 35+ months, a Governmental budget and a pool of previously completed studies to develop this report. The stakeholders (us) have been given access to 10% of the report and less than 2 months to provide (at our cost) our feedback on a subject that will change our lives irrevocably.
- There was no consultation or advice sought from regional communities about issues- advice that has been submitted appears to have been ignored.
- The "public consultation meetings" were a farce, with most people only handed a copy of the guide as they entered the meeting and having no time to study it. *Are you starting to understand why there was vision on the evening news of the guides being burned in frustration?*

### **The "Science" of the plan**

Although we have had only little time to study what little "science" is available to us, here are a few of the highlights...

- Some scientific literature used is limited eg., Sustainable Rivers Audit 2004 -2007 which was conducted right in the middle of the Millennium Drought! The assessment of individual ecosystem's health sites was broad, not on a site by site basis (lots of "modelling" and "indicators")-
- The MDBA claimed initially that a reduction of 3000 GL from across the basin would only result in an impact of \$800 million and 800 job losses. Analysis by industry groups shows a minimum loss of \$2.4 billion in gross production and 17,000 jobs! The MDBA have since revised their prediction upwards.
- Political and planning emphasis has been on recovering water for the environment. There has been no plan on how this huge amount of water will be delivered. There has been no analysis of flood risk or other 3<sup>rd</sup> party risks in the delivering the scale of environmental water proposed. This is identified as a key gap in the MDBA plans –
- Environmental issues affecting the Lower Lakes and Coorong in South Australia have been blamed on other states. This ignores the full facts. Many reports, including a number commissioned in South Australia itself, have identified a range of actions that should be taken to improve the ecology of the Lower Lakes and Coorong site. This area is a highly modified region and it is imperative for Australians to be told the facts on this issue.
- Manmade interventions such as barrages and locks, land reclamation and drainage schemes in South Australia have impacted the Coorong and the Lower Lakes; these are not at all well documented in the MDB Plan.

## **Why the Water Act 2007 needs to be amended:**

The drafting of the Water Act 2007 and resulting Basin Plan is a political response - to a 'drought' crisis in the basin. On so many levels this is a "Bad Act", it desperately needs to be amended:

- Social and economic values are recognised as objectives of the Act but are considered subject to the needs of the environment (It places environment above everything else, even people and food production)
- The environmental objectives of the Act are such that they will decimate communities, but if the environmental objectives of the Act are not met, the Government will undoubtedly find themselves in court being challenged by certain "interested parties." - *More money spent in legal fees!*
- The Act is inconsistent with International and Australian principles on ecological sustainable development – a principle that balances social, economic and the environmental issues.

## **Some FACTS about the environment and the health of the Murray River:**

There is so much misinformation "out there" about the Murray River, please find a moment to read these facts:

- It is natural for Australian rivers and creeks to be dry in major drought periods. Historical records show major droughts have caused many of Australia's rivers to be completely empty.

- With Australia's investment in major water storages and comprehensive water plans that already exist, the Murray River did not go dry. Without such works, it is estimated that the Murray River would have gone dry below Albury in about 2003!
- The Murray is not dead or dying. The Murray kept flowing, supplying water to towns, small amounts for irrigation in some sections and for tourism benefits.
- Murray River salinity crisis levels have not reached the modelled predictions. Salinity levels have been maintained within low to acceptable ranges for the majority of years, even in severe drought.
- Hyper saline conditions in the Southern end of the Coorong were caused by drought and major impacts for SA land drainage schemes that redirected historical flow away from the Coorong and out to sea.
- In the 1830's whilst exploring the lower reaches of the Murray in South Australia, Charles Sturt wrote in his journals how the water was so saline it was "unpalatable" and how "the transition from fresh to salt water was almost immediate." The Murray was open to the sea's tidal influence.
- Extremely low water levels in the Lower Lakes in South Australia are historically normal during such extreme droughts. Prior to 1940 when five artificial barrages were built to convert a natural estuary into permanent freshwater lakes, drought periods would regularly cause sea water intrusions well up into the lower reaches of the Murray River.
- With up to 97% of NSW in major drought during 2001-2010, many NSW rivers and creeks were completely dry. It is not feasible to assume that artificially created freshwater conditions in the Lower Lakes can maintain high water levels during extreme drought.

### The MDBA's proposed solution to "fix" a river that is not dying:

- The MDBA wants to increase the amount of water flowing out of the Murray mouth. The Federal Government has set aside **\$3.1 BILLION DOLLARS** to buy water for the environment. The MDBA has recommended as a minimum, that 3000GL of water is to be recovered for the environment. To compare the scale of water, this equates to almost the entire capacity of the Hume Dam. Of water recovered for the environment, 2000GL of the 3000GL or **two thirds has been recommended to flow out the Murray Mouth and out into the Southern Ocean!** *We recognise that some believe this country has endless amounts of money to spend, but considering we are the driest continent on earth – does this make sense to you?*

### Let's set the record straight:

- This 'Millennium Drought' which commenced in 2001 and broke only this year with widespread flooding, was not a new phenomenon. It was similar in magnitude to the Federation drought of 1895-1903. Drought and flood always have been part of the cycle of Australian weather.
- The Millennium Drought had a detrimental effect on many areas of the Basin; good existing water planning has meant that despite the drought, the Murray River remained relatively healthy not dead or dying as has been widely reported. It, along with the rest of us, has suffered through the worst drought in living history. It is a big river and there are many factors that contribute to some areas of it suffering more than others, unfortunately these severely hit areas are the ones that tended to make the news back at the height of the drought. You may have noticed we have seen very limited coverage of these "dead and dying" areas recently.
- Over the last few years the cry from various interest groups was "The environment needs more water" – with which we did not disagree! But remember the environment was not alone...We ALL needed more water. We were all in drought! Even if the un-tested measures as suggested in 'The Plan' were in place would it have helped? – IT WAS A DROUGHT – Drought is defined as 'a prolonged shortage of rainfall.' It was a basin wide drought - there was no water ANYWHERE! The drought has been seized upon as a reason for unprecedented change to food production in Australia at the expense of rural communities and food security. The environment didn't need more water – we all just needed more rain!
- Despite the myth – Irrigators do not "rob the river of water at the expense of the environment". It was not because of the "Naughty Irrigators" there was no water in the river during the drought. Irrigators are

only allocated water by Government if Government deems there is adequate water available for this purpose. The State Governments look at the water available, do the sums and THEN tell the irrigators how much water they can buy to use for irrigation. If government feels there is not adequate water for irrigation purposes they announce zero allocation. The irrigators are constantly improving their practices to become more efficient with the water they must pay for, and to their credit various government departments have been of great assistance in this pursuit.

## Where to from here?

The Murray Darling Basin is Australia's food bowl and we shouldn't be and can't afford to be playing politics with it however... **We all know that politicians are the only people who can stop this ridiculous plan. We also know that rightly or wrongly, their decisions are swayed by deals their parties do and where the votes lay.**

**We, the people of the Basin can do nothing about either of these factors as we are few in number, so we need your help:**

As a friend or family member of a Murray Darling Basin Dweller we ask you to **contact your Federal MP**, using the "form letter" on pages 6 & 7 of this document as a basis to have this MDB Plan scrapped, and the Water Act 2007 amended. If your "Basin Dwelling Contact" has sent you some additional information or photographs, it would be great if you could include this also.

This campaign relies on the support of many to work, so it would be appreciated if you could forward this email on to other city dwellers who are interested in the truth, common sense and Australian food security.

**We have been labelled by some city people as a "Vocal Minority". This is true, we are very vocal about this issue – because it is WRONG, and we are a minority – there are very few of us living out here, BUT, with the help of a lot of other well informed people we can be the vocal majority!**

If you are not sure who your Federal MP is go to: <http://apps.aec.gov.au/esearch/>  
To email your Federal MP go to: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/memlist.pd>

Below is a list of politicians relevant to this issue. If you have some extra time please can you share with them your views on the "Plan."

**We cannot impress on you enough how important this is!  
Once the food bowl dries up facets important to all Australians will be changed forever.  
PLEASE DO IT NOW!**

## - Additional Information -

If you would like more information here are some links:

### Articles:

*Article on Food Security -Australia should look to its food security, before the farm is sold:*

<http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/australia-should-look-to-its-food-security-before-all-the-farm-is-sold-20101013-16jyw.html>

*Article by Jennifer Marohasy: "Saving the Coorong by restoring its native state":*

<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=7762> –

*ABC News Reports: [ABC News - Murray Darling Basin](#)*

### Websites: