



To Murray Darling Basin Authority: Basin Plan.

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From: Peter & Rhonda Serpell

My wife and I farm in the Kiewa Valley, and use water from the Kiewa River and Running Creek. We have had intensive horticulture, and grow fodder crops using spray and drip irrigation.

The Kiewa river is one of the most reliable streams in the Murray Darling. The combination of high rainfall in the upper catchment, the Bogong high plains peat bogs, and AGL's hydro dams, have insulated the river from the last 15 years of drought. The original allocations on the river were extremely conservative, which is born out in some of the Basin Plan.

We have enjoyed full allocations throughout the years, with only 5 weeks over the past 30 years of rostered pump times.

With the hydro scheme, we are third party regulated system.

On hot days through the summer the cities turn on their air conditioners, and the river is full.

We have had a number of environmental studies conducted in the catchment, and the only detrimental effect is cold water, rises and falls in water height in the river and live stock trampling on river beds and banks. Willows have also affected the ecology of the streams.

Between the NE CMA and land holder, a proportion of the catchment has had Willows removed, and fenced off.

We have a number of issues with the draft Basin Plan:-

- **LAND VALUES**

Real-estate agents estimate that land values for the Kiewa flats where irrigation can be used will reduce by \$1000 per acre. What will this do for farmers equity.

- **EXISTING STUDIES**

None of the following studies have been used in any of the Technical background Volume 2

- 2002 Kiewa River Stream Flow management plan
- 2005 DSE index of stream conditions
- 2006 North East Regional River health Strategy
- 2007 Environmental Flows Determination of the Kiewa (NECMA)
- 2007 Catchment Conditions report (Victorian Catchment Management Council)

Have the Authority worked out how much water they would like at the Murray mouth and worked backwards. Why does the environment of the Kiewa not count?

The only environmental information in the Guide was a study done in 2006 during the year of the greatest deficit of rainfall ever recorded in white history in this area.

- **USE WATER CLOSE TO ITS SOURCE**

Using water in the upper catchment valley's avoids any transmission losses, evaporation is lower than out on the plains, and natural rainfall supplements irrigation. The Kiewa catchment is part of the North East Catchment Management Area, an area that is 2% of the basin, yet this same area contributes 38% of the flows of the Murray Darling Basin.

- **ECONOMIC FLOW ON**

These upper catchment valley's are becoming a Mecca for backpackers able to do seasonal work with the diversity of crops that can be grown in the area. The majority of the money that is learnt by these people is spent back in our small local communities. The Kiewa has a major dairy industry (not singled out in Volume 2 part 1 technical background paper on page 211) yet historically had the highest number of cows per hectare of anywhere in Australia. This industry supports Murray Goulburn Dairies, which has a large factory based in Kiewa. Loosing milk production will impact on this factory, which will in turn flow through to the schools, and other supporting industries.

- **HORTICULTURE CURRENT AND FUTURE POTENTIAL**

Horticulture is a highly geared industry, and both the Ovens and Kiewa Valley's have many new and emerging crops post the closure of the tobacco industry. These crops include hops, green tea, Lucerne, raspberries, blueberries, pumpkin seed, chestnuts, seed and vegetable onions, leafy vegetables, capsicums, olives, grapes, kiwifruit and tomatoes etc. So by removing water for productive agriculture curtails the development of these crops and any others into the future. We have had growers from other areas outside of the basin looking into relocation into this area due to the quality of the climate, soils, and water availability, quality and reliability.

- **WATER REDUCTION**

Though the report suggests that we will lose between 40 and 45%, when you exclude urban bulk entitlements, stock and domestic, commercial, plantations and farm dams with a question mark over hydro dams being included in the interception the final figure may well exceed 70% of water used by surface water irrigators.

- **GROUND WATER**

The current proposed basin plan lumps the Mulindolingong ground water basin (Upper Kiewa) into the Ovens ground water area, yet there is a very large mountain range between the two. There are no studies that show that these two ground water basins are connected.

- **SDL FOR KEIWA AND OVENS**

In Volume 2 Technical Background part 1 page 185 the Kiewa and Ovens

*"Relatively low level of use. Outflows included in the modelling framework. Limited capacity to modify end-of-system flows to meet downstream water requirements."*

The plan then goes on to say

*"Set SDL based on applying the approach to contributing to downstream requirements."*

These two quotes seem to be in conflict with one another, and would tend to suggest that you intend to squeeze every last drop out of these catchments at the expense of the communities that live inside them.

- **WILLOW REMOVAL**

CSIRO conducted a study on Billabong Creek in the Riverina on the comparison between Willows and native trees. They found that 1 Ha. of Willow canopy consumed 3.5 ML. more water than natives. The Kiewa still has a large area infested with Willows on its banks. The river system would get far more water by removal of Willow, and replanting with natives than by taking water from irrigators.

- **LUMPING THE KIEWA IN WITH THE MURRAY**

It is hard to extract any worthwhile information from the Basin Plan on the Kiewa, as it is stuck in with the Murray, which includes Broken Hill .

We look forward to your response to these questions, and others raised by our community.

Yours sincerely Peter & Rhonda Serpell.