

13/12/10

Chairman
Standing Committee on Regional Australia
PO BOX 6021
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

Submission No: 338
Date Received: 16/12/10
Secretary: SL

Dear Sir,

I am writing to offer comment on the MDBA's guide to the proposed Basin Plan

I am a retired veterinary surgeon and had 8 years working for NSW Ag followed by 30 years rural practice. I am now farming - mostly sheep, and also have a small irrigation entitlement on a small private scheme that has not functioned for several years.

I therefore have had plenty of exposure to the inefficiencies, misdirection & bureaucratic arrogance displayed in many government programmes and thought I was unshockable.

However at the MDBA's Narrandera "Information" meeting I was shocked and very saddened. This was an obviously expensive exercise, accompanied by several volumes of expensive books full of misleading and inaccurate "science". The speakers assured us that the "plan" was our best option and included major concessions to lessen the blow that ideal environmental plans would require.

The speaker from the outset explained that the terms of reference for MDBA's investigations were determined by the Water Act 2007 and therefore confined to environmental requirements. Further that Australia MUST comply with International agreements - without giving any detail. Therefore we should all be grateful that MABA was so concerned with our welfare that any water would be available at all.

- ① The Water Act and our obligation to mysterious agreements must be challenged. If the legislation is flawed it must be corrected. Agreements signed off on without consultation with the community should at least be debated or preferably rejected.

The removal of water distribution from State lands is an important constitutional issue. The current use of variable allocations depending on water availability has the flexibility needed to cope with variable run-off. To replace the old system with a more inflexible SDL one ignores the realities. Further it can only reduce irrigators' optimism in good years - 20% of 1000 megs leaves the prospect of more in the future but 100% of 200 megs doesn't.

The "Science" - climatic, hydrologic, environmental - is open to question. The accuracy of information of period on the mid-Murrumbidgee wetlands is poor and attempts to mislead the reader eg. Is Fivebough Swamp at Leeton watered by the Murrumbidgee flood plain? - no. Fivebough rates because of the RATSAR listing but actually important sites are omitted.

The importance of the lower lakes is obvious - water wastage is huge and South Australian votes are more important than rural votes. But the question arises - how is it a RATSAR fresh water wetland when it is an estuary?

The only way to stop the tidal flows is the bargages - installed I believe in the 1930's. If our climate has indeed changed so much it is surely time to remove the bargages and allow the lower lake environment to return to normal. Even the MABA speaker conceded that the lack of variation in water depth of the Lakes was environmentally bad.

The "accountancy" of water flows is not believable & purely speculative. Why is no mention made of Snowy Hydro storage capacity.

The inevitability of ever decreasing run off must be questioned. How

many floods like October + December well it take before the "scientists" might start to doubt their own infallibility.

The Lockhart, Kywoog, Narrandera areas have had severe flooding in some cases exacerbated by high dam releases to "piggy-back" natural high flows. Similar events happened in 1991, 1974, 1956, 1951, 1931 & as far back as you like to go. The unfortunate ideology of keeping dams close to full in wet years except for environmental flows seems dumb.

② Doubt The evidence presented by probably biased "scientists". Challenge the gospel truths peddled by the bureaucrats.

If the climate has changed the barges should go.

If the climate hasn't changed the "scientists" should go.

Because of my age, experience + scepticism I searched the MORA's Technical Background Parts 1, 2 + 3 looking for a reason for remarkably high cuts recommended for the Murrumbidgee valley - and I believe I've found the well concealed answer.

Because of the relatively high storage capacity of Berrinjuck &

Blowing dams there is a higher potential for the wanted environmental flows for the lower lakes to come down this river. But it gets worse - the environmental lobby espouses the merits of overbank flows but is not happy that 1 in 5 or 10 year flows don't occur more often. In fact MDBA advocates such flows be increased to annual - perhaps that won't be enough?

MDBA Technical background even states that such flows should not have much impact on towns and bridges, but expresses no sympathy for impacted rural producers.

I feel the impact of man made flooding could exceed the lost production from reduced water available for irrigation

- ③ Question how the high flows are to reach the Murray Mouth without major damage
- ④ Question the ecology - probably annual floods will do the environment more harm than good - as well as wreck more livelihoods

MDBA sings the praises of our Water Trading scheme, but unfortunately the truth is that it has caused

major problem. The market has been distorted ~~or~~ or manipulated by traders, Managed Investment Schemes & Governments.

State Govt administration of allocation has been complicated by irrigators paying to convert general security entitlements to high security & then trading at a profit

Trading of water has left many irrigators at the end of dry channels unable to access their allocation - I'm one of them

⑤ Review the water trading rules - don't believe MDBA's glowing assessment

I believe the Water Act and the subsequent MDBA Basin Plan has the potential to do more damage to regional & rural Australia than the last 30 years of centralisation has done.

River health has actually been improving and there are better ways to improve flows than those proposed

Yours Faithfully

(J. C. WILTSE B VSc)