

Submission to

Inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia

The farming community has always been resilient throughout changes to its operating environment, however this has taken its toll on the people and the profitability of their businesses.

Further changes brought about with water reforms will have significant impacts on the sustainability of the farmers as well as their community.

Falling terms of trade through weak Government policy have left agriculture without the ability to weather reductions in their business through water reform.

The water reforms include substantial infrastructure investment by the government/taxpayers to increase the efficiency in which it's delivered and used on farm.

In order to ensure the investment in water savings, the stability and profitability of farming as well as the survival of communities and towns based around the basin, we must ensure the remaining farming enterprises are profitable and the commodities they grow are competitive in the marketplace.

The water buyback issue must be expanded to include more than just water being traded for money. It must include legislative change as compensation to ensure the sustainable future of farmers and their communities.

I have some key issues of environmental water policy I believe can return profitability back to farming while meeting Environmental goals.

Legislation change including the following will greatly influence the future of farming.

- Truth in labelling – Must empower consumers with the ability to differentiate goods produced in Australia to Australian standards
- Equal Import laws - Imported fruit/vegies/meat must have equal environmental/social costs as incurred by Australian producers (WTO basis for trade) else a levy to equal to the costs Australian products incur. E.g. caged chickens, OH & S, Minimum wage, licensing and regulation.
- Export product equalisation - compensation for Australian environmental and social costs.
- Monopolistic trade - supermarkets/fuel/fertiliser/ processors/banking all use their market share to influence prices or costs to farmers. Greater power to ACCC and stronger antitrust laws.

- Marketing – Coordinated marketing to return growers control of their future to compete in world markets.
- Environmental guardianship - ongoing payment for native veg act effected land, for the increased energy used with water efficient irrigation(drip/pivot) and water leased for the environment(leasing allows farmers to have an income stream and keep the asset, as well as give the opportunity for farmers to buy time when planting new crops or as a basis for minimum returns for crops grown).
- Bio security – Strengthen the ability to protect our industries reputation for clean produce and minimise the costs incurred for exotic outbreaks (We already have the highest costs of any country)
- Energy security – Ethanol and bio diesel minimal percentages will deliver Environmental and Economic benefits to our economy.
- Food security – Australia may face the problem of no longer having the Infrastructure, Knowledge or skilled people available supply its population or capitalise on the position.

Water issues have polarised the community, However we must not forget that agriculture has been suffering a cash drought for a sometime due to deteriorating term of trade, The supply chain has been passing costs down to the farmer without the farmer being able to add these on to their sales.

It will take legislation change for greater farm profitability to return young people to farming and with them, the infrastructure rural communities need.

Accurate science with compensation both monetary and with legislative changes ensures farmers will deliver Australia a sustainable and healthy environment while building a prosperous growing rural economy.

Yours sincerely

Bart Brighenti

4th generation Citrus Grower situated in the Riverina.

Australias largest citrus growing area.