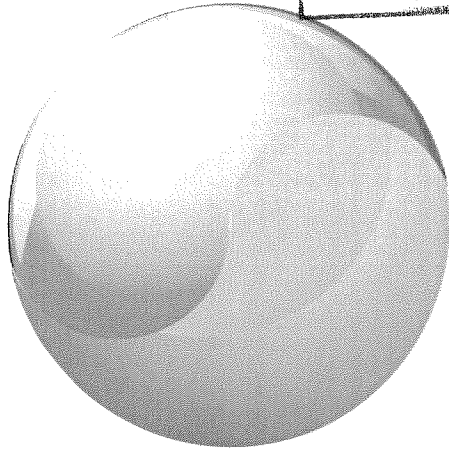


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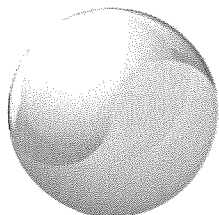
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
REGIONAL AUSTRALIA
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MGCC
Murray Group of Concerned Communities

Presentation to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia

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



MGCC
Murray Group of Concerned Communities

The MGCC represents the Central Murray region of 31,300 people who are passionate about living and working in these regional and rural communities. The Central Murray communities have already given 17.5 per cent of water entitlements to the environment.

Supported by: Berrigan & District Development Association, Berrigan Shire Council, Berriquin Landholders Association, Bullatale Creek Trust, Conargo Shire Council, Deniboota Landholders Association, Deniliquin Shire Council, Deniliquin Pastoral Times, Denimein Landholders Association, Jerilderie Shire Council, Moira Private Irrigation Scheme, Murray Catchment Management Authority, Murray Irrigation Limited, Murray Shire Council, Murray Valley Community Action Group, Murray Valley Private Diverters, Murrumbidgee Private Irrigators, Peppin Planners, RAMROC, Ricegrowers' Association of Australia, Southern Riverina Irrigators, Sunrice, Wakool Action Group, Wakool Rivers Association, Wakool Landholders Association, Wakool Shire Council, West Berriquin Landholders Association, West Cororgan Private Irrigation

Public Hearing Deniliquin 24th January 2011 MGCC Presentation

Thankyou for the opportunity to present to the Committee today.

Can I say from the outset that we are strongly supportive of a basin plan but the proposed plan is **totally unacceptable**. We will only support a plan that creates certainty and confidence, one that provides a future for our children and their children, a future that is full of options and opportunities.

The proposed plan as outlined in the Guide will achieve the following:

Cost thousands of jobs, close family farms & drive up food prices.

The Guide needs to be withdrawn. It treats our communities with contempt, disregarding the resultant impacts this proposed plan will have. The trade-off being communities for the environment. It has created erroneous reference points eg the \$800m annual economic loss with a mere 800 jobs lost. These must be rectified. It is has completely eroded the confidence and certainty for our communities. Confidence & certainty will not be restored until the Guideline to the MDB Plan is withdrawn and rewritten.

Before it can be rewritten the Water Act must be changed. This is supported by the fact there is conflicting opinion on the strict interpretation of the Act and whether it can deliver a true triple bottom line. As a community we cannot afford to have this risk placed upon us even if there is the slightest amount of ambiguity. While this remains, our communities will always run the risk of being undermined. As a Government it cannot afford to take the risk. I note for the purpose of the record the Chair of this Parliamentary Inquiry abstained from voting on the Act when it was put before Parliament. This fact reinforces our concerns in regard to the Act being flawed.

The Act needs to be the mechanism that achieves a true balance between environmental, social and economic considerations. Currently the Acts puts international treaties (such as the RAMSAR Convention) in the front

position and only considers socio economic requirements after the requirements of these treaties have been satisfied.

The Act needs to consider a framework where both the Federal & State Governments along with the Authority can work in harmony to ensure an effective development and implementation of the plan. Currently this is certainly not the case.

To provide a perspective.

The drought years where access to water has been significantly reduced provides a perspective for what will be a precursor to the proposed plan. In 2006 the population of Deniliquin was 8000 currently the population is at 7400. This decline was driven by the reduced access to water which culminated in the closure of the largest rice mill in the southern hemisphere. The diminished access to water created 100's of job losses. At the mill alone it was 200. The effects of the 8% decrease in the population have been felt right across the community, with no sector being left untouched.

Coupled with the direct effects of the drought MIL customers have relinquished 17.5% of the total MIL entitlements for environmental benefits. To demonstrate the significance of this and the risks our communities face, a report done by Marsden & Jacobs found that many farm businesses would become unviable if long term access to water was reduced by 20% or more with direct flow on effects being felt in the communities. It also found that 90% of businesses rely directly on irrigated agriculture.

The drivers of these outcomes has been the drought but clearly it identifies the risk to our communities if this plan proceeds as is currently proposed where our community could lose up to 50% of water. A permanent political drought will result.

My colleague will identify the impacts across our business community.

Water is the driver of our economy.

What we require is:

- Certainty and the rebuilding of confidence
 - A strong community is based on these fundamentals
 - This is driven by good public policy based on vision and innovation
 - This stimulates the flow of capital and confidence
 - This provides strong socio/economic outcomes that lead to good environmental outcomes
- The Water Act must be amended as a matter of priority
- Full and effective community engagement on a valley by valley basis that reflects the diversity across each valley.
- Socio/economic assessments done on a regional, sub regional and micro basis that reflects the short, medium and long term impacts, not just long term.
- Prioritise and create coordination between water buy back and infrastructure investment. (Just buying water exacerbates community and business confidence eroding economic activity.)
- The Plan needs to take into account the environmental initiatives & contributions that have already been achieved.
- The Plan needs to ensure there is fair and equitable trade offs across the basin.
- The Plan needs to be based on long term benefits not short term political, economic and environmental outcomes. (The current floods reinforce this.)
- The Plan needs to encompass innovative & creative solutions that are based on commonsense and not a strategy of simply adding water because it is the cheapest solution.
- The Plan needs to be based on community driven solutions.
- The Plan needs to identify, monitor and review targets for the triple bottom line outcomes where there is clear criteria & definition for river health, strong communities and strong food production.

We have a desire to achieve the outcomes of a healthy environment based on strong communities that provide a future for our children and their children, where water is used effectively and efficiently. To this end we want to work with Government and the Authority to achieve a balanced equitable outcome where communities are not left in a state of uncertainty with high levels of anxiety.

In closing I would like to quote Mr. Mike Taylor when he announced his departure from the Murray Darling Basin Authority.

“While the Authority has an important part to play, it is neither powered nor equipped to undertake the entire complex task.”

“... a successful Plan would require both Commonwealth and States to work together on a comprehensive range of policy, planning and implementation issues in consultation with relevant community, industry and environmental groups.”

We strongly recommend the Inquiry take heed of Mr. Taylor’s comments when making its finding known to the Government.

The stakes are far too high to get this wrong. Our communities demand good public policy that ensures a future that is based on certainty and confidence.