

Minority Report

Australian Greens

1.1 In our Minority Report on the Water Amendment Bill 2008 the Australian Greens outlined our concerns with the approach both the Commonwealth and State Governments are taking to managing the Murray Darling Basin System, we made a series of recommendations and we proposed a way forward – *The MDB 2010-2050 Plan*.

1.2 The Basin is facing a crisis of a scale and magnitude that outstrips any agricultural or environmental challenge of the past. The scale of the crisis is becoming greater every year. The magnitude of our response must reflect this scale if we are to avoid serious social consequences for basin communities, a significant threat to our food security, and the irretrievable loss of precious habitats. While there has been some progress in negotiations with Victoria and some *ad hoc* community planning is occurring, we remain deeply concerned about the future of the system and believe that further reform is necessary.

1.3 While we agree with many of the recommendations of the majority report we can not support putting off purchases of water when they become available. Instead we urge the Government to put more resources into community planning and not rely on the *ad hoc* patchwork process that is occurring in the Basin at present.

1.4 Food production and security remain vitally important issues, and we need to take a strategic approach to ensuring that we keep our most productive lands in agriculture as much as possible. At the same time we must face the reality of the fact that the system has been over-allocated and we will need to push on with improving the efficiency of our irrigation infrastructure and returning more water to the system to ensure our levels of water extraction are sustainable for the long term.

1.5 The Australian Greens strongly agree that the issues of the monitoring surface water and groundwater use, and of the unregulated interception of overflow flows need urgently addressing.

1.6 The Australian Greens recommend:

That the Basin Plan be developed and implementation commenced by 2011.

That existing State water sharing plans should be required to come into line with the Basin Plan within 6 months of its release, and not delayed until 2014 (or 2019 in Victoria).

That community planning is better co-ordinated, facilitated and resourced to enable communities to produce plans which integrate infrastructure investment, water sales and structural adjustment.

That integrated community plans are prioritised in assessing applications for funding under *Water for Our Future*.

That the Water Act should be amended to:

- **Exclude consideration of new extractive uses outside of the basin in the provisions of the Basin Plan**
- **Ensure the Objects of the Act and the Murray Darling Basin Authority have an explicit focus on managing environmental health and resilience**
- **Achieve integration with *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* and compliance with Ramsar and other international environmental treaties**
- **Ensure that water entitlements are defined as shares of available water, and take into account the variability of the northern basin**

Senator Rachel Siewert

Australian Greens