

Subject: Demand for Immediate Action to Save the Murray Darling Basin

Dear Members of the Review Committee,

We write to you today with a sense of urgency and a demand for immediate action to rescue the deteriorating state of the Murray Darling Basin. The time for passive deliberation is over; we require a bold and assertive approach to address the critical issues plaguing the Basin's survival.

We insist on a plan that is firmly rooted in irrefutable evidence and the real-life experiences of those residing in the Basin. The voices of the people who intimately understand the challenges and intricacies of this region must be heard and heeded. It is their wisdom that will guide us towards effective solutions.

The current approach that prioritizes volumes over outcomes is an egregious mistake that must be rectified without delay. We need a comprehensive plan that grants equal importance to the Environmental, Economic, and Social aspects of the Basin. Only by achieving a delicate balance between these pillars can we secure the well-being of our businesses, regions, and families.

Let it be known that the Murray Darling Basin Plan must serve the interests of all Australians, not just those of South Australia. While we acknowledge the importance of water supply for industry and recreational activities, we categorically reject any agenda that places undue favoritism on one region at the expense of the broader national interest.

The Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) must shed its complacency and acknowledge the abject failure of on-farm efficiency projects. It is time to listen and respond to the resounding chorus of discontent from those directly affected. The ripple effect of water management extends far beyond the farm gate, impacting the wider community, including essential services, healthcare, education, and small businesses. Failure to consider this broader perspective will result in further resentment and anger among affected communities.

No longer shall we tolerate a top-down approach driven by bureaucratic whims. The MDBA must recognize that true solutions arise from the practical knowledge, experience, and understanding of the locals who are intimately connected to the Basin's lifeblood. We demand the immediate inclusion of these voices, dismantling the barriers that have hindered their participation in shaping the future of the Basin.

It is imperative that the MDBA acknowledges and appreciates the enormous economic benefits generated by upstream irrigators. The gravity-fed irrigation systems in New South Wales and Victoria not only provide vital environmental habitats but also offer a carbon-free means of delivering water without the need for energy-intensive pumping. Failing to recognize these contributions perpetuates an unjust and imbalanced plan.

Furthermore, the MDBA must bear the weight of responsibility for the depression and suicides that have plagued communities throughout the Basin. The mental health implications of water management decisions cannot be brushed aside. The provision of reliable and assured water allocations is not a luxury but a necessity for our hardworking irrigators to continue farming and contribute to the nation's prosperity.

When considering Basin Plan water recovery, we demand an unequivocal recognition that approximately 90% of the Basin wetlands reside on private property. New South Wales and Victoria have borne the burden of water recovery for far too long, while South Australia has shirked its responsibilities. The time for equitable sharing of this responsibility has arrived.

We reject the notion that the return to pre-settlement environmental conditions is feasible. The landscape has been forever altered, and we must now focus on adaptive and sustainable solutions. .

The recovery of water from the Southern Basin has no impact on fish deaths in the Darling system. We must confront the broader issues that have affected the river's health throughout history. The historical floodplain inundations, which created flourishing habitats for our first nations people and diverse ecosystems, must be acknowledged and factored into the plan. Let us chart a course that embraces innovative approaches harmonizing with nature.

Inclusive collaboration among states is non-negotiable for success. The South Australian government must actively participate in addressing the damage caused by excessive water recovery and acknowledge the detrimental impact on upstream communities. The politically driven target of 450 gigs must be reevaluated, as it lacks substantiation and serves as an impediment to achieving a sustainable and equitable solution. Genuine cooperation between states is indispensable to forging a path forward.

The purported environmental benefits of the Basin Plan remain questionable despite the exorbitant expenditure of 13 billion dollars. Forest health has declined, carp populations have soared, and native fish deaths from black-water events have become all too frequent. The MDBA's mismanagement has left the once-majestic Murray River scarred by erosion, silting, and fallen trees causing the river to become wider and shallower. This is an unacceptable legacy.

Let it be known that the Murray Darling Basin Plan has lost sight of its true purpose. It has devolved into a political tool serving the interests of South Australia without proper metering or measurement in that state. This must change immediately. The plan must be grounded in accountability and transparency, ensuring accurate monitoring and reporting of water usage.

We are weary of writing submissions that disappear into oblivion, with no meaningful response. We are tired of attending meetings where our concerns fall on deaf ears. We demand more than empty gestures; we demand action.

The management of the MDBA has been nothing short of atrocious. The dams teeter on the brink of overflowing, and the Basin is at an unprecedented flood risk. These imminent dangers cannot be ignored. As a wise local said, "Never before in history has so much water been sitting above us."

The time for equivocation is over. The time for bold action is now. We implore you to seize this opportunity to salvage the Murray Darling Basin and secure a sustainable future for generations to come.

Yours steadfastly,

Ron & Val McWhae

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