

# Murray-Darling Basin Plan: Implementation Review 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to present our opinions on the MDBP.

I do not speak for all Aboriginal peoples in the Narromine, Trangie, Warren, and Nyngan LALC's, but rather I convey their concerns to you. We have no funding to support a permanent position to give us a voice in these consultations. Just one old elder with some time on his hands to plead justice on our behalf. This is not my voice, but the voices of many, and their concern is real for the future of our Country. I ask no more from you than to have our voices heard, and our concerns addressed.

## You must:

- **Deliver the Basin Plan in full as soon as possible.**
- **Buy back or secure water for the Environment as a matter of urgency.**
- **Build better Community Engagement Groups, and not just listen to big irrigation.**
- **Continue to gather data and make it easier to access for all concerned groups.**
- **Promote the Climate Change risks and develop plans to address them before it's too late.**
- **Discuss water availability and the future of all the valley.**
- **Look into future mining, their water requirements and where that will come from.**
- **Investigate population growth and its impact on our water resource.**
- **Look at best practice, less dams not more, restore flows for the benefit of Country.**
- **Cultural Water needs to be defined and implemented now.**
- **First Nations engagement needs to be recognised, valued, and expanded.**

## The Plan.

The NSW Coalition government has had little appetite for the urgent changes that were needed to be made to return to sustainable levels of extraction throughout the entire Basin. Water reform was given a low priority, and this is now evident in the low recovery rate for the system as a whole. WSP's have been deliberately delayed so as to not upset a vocal and powerful portion of the LNP's voter base, big irrigation. We are expecting bigger and better things from our new state Labor Government, including getting the Basin Plan back on track.

## Buy Backs:

Water buy-backs from willing sellers needs to become more of a priority despite the push-back from big irrigation. Willing sellers are the most cost efficient and effective means to recover water for the environment. These buybacks will have the best value ROI of any planned recovery, far better than dubious water efficiency programs. But you need to act now and concentrate not on buying back licenses that have never been used and would never be used but buying back real water volumes and returning them to the river.

## Community Engagement.

We need to have united discussion groups and not divide and isolate people with differing views. This will no doubt need to be micro-managed to cool tempers but both groups need to have the opportunity to voice their concerns to people who don't necessarily agree with them. Strict controls would need to be in place, but this is, in my opinion, the only way forward. Don't expect consensus but you will get more information from this collaboration than by listening to many separate groups with different agendas and points of view.

## Data gathering.

About five years ago we asked for rainfall rejection figures from WaterNSW concerning the Wambuul/Macquarie River, and to date have not received an answer from them. There should be a penalty applied for wilfully withholding information that does not contravene privacy or commercial in confidence rules.

**Climate Change.**

The MDBA needs to publicly clarify its policy on Climate Change and its possible impact on the plan. We have a situation whereby some participants in these conversations clearly think that their personal opinion should be group policy. Consensus of the group should hold sway over individual members opinion.

**Water availability into the future.**

Future water availability needs to be discussed now, not when a crisis is imminent. The discussion should have started when it became accepted that Climate Change is real and its impact, although still not fully known, would mean a revision of the WSP.

**Mining needs.**

We need to look to the future of mining in the valley. Cotton was once the largest employer in our section of the Basin. Everyone who wanted to work could easily find a job with big irrigation. Now with mechanisation and contract services more and more of our younger generation leave their towns in search of permanent employment. The subsequent drain on the workforce is evident during busy times such as harvest or picking when labour is stretched almost to breaking point.

**Population.**

Our youth leave our towns in numbers I have never seen before. Population centres in the valley are predicted to grow slowly up to at least 2030 but the casualisation of the workforce means that those who choose to stay find it increasingly difficult to get loans for cars and houses due to their casual employment situation.

**Flow.**

Our rivers need to flow to survive. Dams are not the answer to reviving our river systems. One proposal is a "mid-river regulator", a huge dam at Gin-Gin near Trangie. Despite the late inclusion of a fishway to this barrier to natural flow, fish migration will be negatively affected. Thirty-two kilometres of still water when full, will not only impact breeding for fish that need flows to instigate breeding cycles, but will actually benefit Carp because they suffer less due to lack of flow and river height variability factors.

**Country.**

Our Country was managed with very little interference from our people for thousands of years and the river's health and wellbeing was such that Governor Lachlan Macquarie (after whom the river was re-named) on a visit felt compelled to state that he had never seen such an abundance of fish in a river before (clearly visible on horseback from top of the bank). We need to have a say on the revival of our rivers and waterholes for the benefit of all Australians through traditional Indigenous knowledge and culture.

**First Nations.**

No consultation should be complete without input from the people responsible for "The Greatest Estate on Earth". Our Culture is our Country, and respect for all living things is what drives us today to rectify the mistakes made in the past. Country, Culture, Environment and Self are one within us, and helping to guide you is mutually beneficial to us all. Many mistakes have been made in the past, lets look to a future where we can all live and thrive, and our healthy rivers will be there forever, for all to enjoy.

Warm regards,

Tony Lees.

Trangie Local Aboriginal Land Council,

Chair, Cultural and Heritage Committee.