

Submission on the Basin Plan Implementation review

After Brain storming with my board members looking for positives that have come from the implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan to both our region and our members, I can honestly say that we could not come up with one. However, the negatives are more of a where do I start scenario. So, to that end I will start at the beginning, when Tony Bourke first brought the basin plan to Griffith, it was apparent just how important water is to the community by the way they turned up in force to voice their concerns.

Since that time, we have seen the price of water skyrocket due to the manipulation by investors, while no one would argue that water had to be divested from the land for expansion, due to on farm efficiencies like drip irrigation. It should never have been allowed into the hands of investors with no way of using it, this water should have been put into a pool whereby it could only be accessed by water users, being towns, irrigators, the environmental and cultural water.

The first lot of water buybacks were aimed at providing a greater than market price for the water that was purchased under the Water Wise program, as an incentive for growers to participate. The program was aimed at providing capital that would be spent on creating efficiencies in irrigation on farm, we can now look back on this and see what the outcomes have been long term. Smaller growers used the money to convert from flood irrigation to drip irrigation and other efficiencies in the spirit that the scheme was intended, most of these growers would now tell you that had they known what the future would hold they would not have gone down this path due to the rising cost of power to move the water that was once free with gravity. However, some larger players used this scheme to make money while upgrading their farms by selling large amounts of water, at \$4000 per megaliter and then buying it all back at a considerably lower price off the open market.

It is important to remember that there is already a water market, so if the government really must have a water buyback you would think that this would be the vehicle that should be used.

In our region we have high security water and general security water, this was devised to enable perennial horticulture to maintain crops in times of drought. During drought general security allocations are reduced to reflect the amount of water available for irrigation, as the general security allocation was designed to service annual crops. High security water should only be available to service towns and permanent plantings, as annual crops don't have to be planted if water is not available. When we are in a drought so is the environment, that's how nature works, which means that only general security water should be targeted if buybacks are necessary.

I have a small property on the Lachlan River overlooking Wyangala Dam, I was brought up in the area and have watched this dam fill up and dry out and am only too aware of just how fast it can fill up under the correct conditions. So, when it was almost full in spring of last year with large rain events being forecast and nothing being released, I could not believe what I was seeing. The floods that hit Forbes could have been minimized with correct management and I am not alone in thinking this, the only reason that I can think of is that the system is over allocated, not just in the Lachlan River but the whole of the basin. The only way that we can think of to fix this is to build more dams, as last year showed just how much water was wasted flowing out to sea. The environment got a good drink just like it's supposed to when we have floods, however proper management could have seen the severity of those floods lessened if banking water in the dams was not such a high priority. The increase in the price of



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water is I believe the main reason that it is being parked in dams, combined with overallocation of the system.

We need this system to be transparent from upper catchments to the ocean, we need to see in real time what percentage of the water running through the system is being utilized for what reason. We need to see what the volumes held in storages are earmarked for, and we need to see environmental water used as the environment intended.

Environmental water should be managed as nature intended wetlands are given a drink in times of flooding not drought. We must not forget that before we had dams and weirs that regulated the system rivers would dry up in times of drought, so for water to be sent down the river in dry times under the banner of environmental only to become irrigation water once it crosses a border is beyond belief.

Winegrape growers in the warm inland regions are under considerable stress due to the oversupply caused by the tariffs imposed by the Chinese, this came about due to accusations re COVID by the government at the time. This has caused a huge oversupply especially in red varieties, we are worried that this could cause a mental health emergency. The MDBA plan to buy back water will increase the likelihood of this becoming a reality, as the price of water and access to it rises due to these reforms.

I hope that you take my concerns seriously and work toward addressing these issues, as a sustainable future for the Murray-Darling basin depends on the responsible actions of all those involved.

Yours Sincerely

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