



Please address all communications to the General Manager.

Submission to Productivity Commission on Murray Darling Basin – Implementation Review 2023

Reference is made to the Review being undertaken by the Productivity Commission into the Murray Darling Basin Plan and the outcome-based actions. On behalf of the Bourke Shire Council, I would like to advise that representatives from Council attended the Commission's briefing at Bourke and that this letter relates to issues raised in this meeting and from general observations.

The township of Bourke, and the surrounding Shire, is a community in the Basin that has been significantly impacted as a result of the implementation of the surface water diversions Cap (the Cap) and from the water buy back . It has been estimated that up to 60% of the local economy has been impacted as a result of the implementation of the Cap process with a further 10% of the economy impacted through the water buyback process. Both these processes have resulted in both economic and social reduction.

1. The Barwon-Darling Water Resource Plan

Council has been provided information that there have been five (5) Water Resource Plans (WRPs) accredited in NSW. Eight (8) are currently with the MDBA awaiting approval, whilst the NSW Water Minister has withdrawn seven (7) plans, including the Barwon-Darling WRP.

The withdrawing of the Barwon-Darling WRP is apparently due to an issue regarding Environmental Water. In this regard there is expected to be significantly more work to be undertaken through the Departments before the Plan is relodged and signoff is completed.

In 2018, the Commission found that the institutional and governance arrangements for the Plan had major shortcomings that posed a significant risk to the Plan. Part of this was having an accredited WRP. Without an accredited WRP to date there will still be major shortcomings.

2. Bourke Environmental Recovery Story

The Commonwealth data, Bourke's weir pool (Section 10) has no recovery shares listed for Environmental Recovery. This creates frustration. Bourke (section 10 in the table below) has not been impacted by any recovery programs to date. This is why the STBIFM efficiency units should be placed back at their point of recovery.

The 2006 NSW CAP recovery also needs to be acknowledged in this space to show the actual socio-economic impact of environmental water recovery on the Bourke community.

Entitlement Allocated in Planning Zones

River Planning Units	Total Volume of Unregulated Entitlement (DPIE LTWP-2020)	Commonwealth Shares (HEW)
1 Mungindi to Boomi	7549	
2 Boomi to Mogil Mogil	186 Plus HEW	3731
3 Mogil Mogil Weir Pool	0	
4 Mogil Mogil to Collerenebri	1738 not including HEW	16215
5 Collerenebri to Walgett	9249 not including HEW	HEW not accounted for by CEWO
6 Walgett Weir pool	3261	
7 Walget to Boorooma	7168	
8 Boorooma to Brewarrina	45995.5 including HEW	323
9 Brewarrina to Culgoa	14062.3	
10 Culgoa to Bourke	55072.7	
11 Bourke to Louth	11637 not including HEW	8362
12 Louth to Tilpa	860	
13 Tilpa to Wilcannia	1929	
14 Wilcannia to Lake Wetherell	1072	

3. Critical Human Water Needs.

The Commission states that 'concerns continue to be raised about water quality and security in some areas'. Water Security for Bourke is at the top of Councils list of strategic priorities. The raising of the Bourke Weir is an issue that has been pursued without success by the Bourke Community for a significant period of time. A reliable and sustainable water supply is required for the proper functioning of the town.

The need to ensure water security for Bourke is necessary for critical human needs, town water supplies and provide related socio-economic, environmental and cultural benefits.

There are currently 29 weirs along the Barwon-Darling River and adjoining tributaries.

The previous State Government committed \$4.21m to develop a Strategic Business Case for the Bourke Weir – this was as part of the Western Weirs Program. The Western Weirs Program was identified as Critical State Significant Infrastructure as part of the Water Supply (Critical Needs) Bill 2019.

In 2020 it was identified that the Western Weirs Program had a broad timeframe of some four (4) years until construction commences. We are now in 2023 and are no further advanced with The Better Baaka Program having absorbed the previous Western Weirs Program.

Bourke Shire continues to lobby both the Commonwealth and State Government to support this important project. Without additional water security, the Bourke community is unfairly exposed and vulnerable to the forecasted extreme summer(s) ahead, noting that once water ceases to flow over the Bourke Weir, the community has but six (6) month's supply of water from the Bourke Weir Pool.

4. Other issues with Plan implementation

Bourke has sadly endured 17 years of being unsupported in this space. Having lost 70% of its capital wealth in the 2006 Cap, not one dollar was forthcoming to licence holders and the Bourke community for industry readjustment.

Furthermore, after enduring further wealth loss through buybacks, the Bourke community stands to lose further social capital with the current Bridging The Gap voluntary buyback.

A further permanent reduction in water is likely to permanently constrain any economic and social recovery of Bourke and entrench and significantly worsen existing high levels of social disadvantage, particularly among its large indigenous population.

Further permanent water reductions under future Federal Government policy decisions are likely to have additional impacts on irrigators and related businesses that have been able to remain viable despite prolonged recent stress points. Further reductions in irrigation water in a community like Bourke may remove 'bounce back' options altogether for some businesses.

If these changes are to be enacted, at the very least, State and Federal government should provide compensation to affected local communities (through Local Government) with the following;

- Dollar for dollar remuneration. For every dollar offered to the licence holder, the same value should be reserved for community adjustment.
- When efficiency water entitlements are recovered, they need to remain in their original planning zones, thus, eliminating the current bias.
- When water is transferred from industry to the environment, local jobs should be created within environmental management roles to replace the industry jobs lost.

Council thanks you for the opportunity to make comment on the review into the Basin Pan.

Yours faithfully

Barry Hollman
Mayor