

Firstly thank you for the opportunity to submit to the Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission.

After attending the Royal Commission Community Consultation in Mildura we feel compelled to submit our opinions and thoughts in line with the Terms of Reference document (objectives and purposes) provided by the commission.

My wife and I own property on the lower darling, within the influence of the Wentworth weir pool. We have a significant area along the river that consists of a billabong, flood plain, river red gum forest and box trees. We are able to witness first-hand the low/ no flows, the high volume flows that erode the banks and the non-regular flood events.

We feel that the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has failed in its entirety to deliver environmental outcomes under its governance and management. The adjustments to the plan of late are irresponsible to say the least. With the lack of authority, planning and massive water theft by some up-stream irrigators the Menindee lacks and sections of the Darling rivers system are dry. To continue with the plan, under current governance, and in its current form, we as Australian people are failing in our duties to be responsible custodians for future generations.

As a brief “opinion pre-cursor” to comments, we believe:

- A continuous, joined and slow flowing river system is ideal for community, irrigators and environment
- Irrigators should be sorted into specific categories; 1. Small family farms supporting family, 2. Larger family run farms, and 3. Large corporate farms, to determine compliance requirements
- All flood plains require water at some stage, not just specific ones
- Permanent plantings need to take priority over annual plantings
- People, communities and the environment have a greater need for water than large corporates
- All writers of scientific studies and “significant” opinion papers relative to the Murray-Darling Basin to be invited to structured workshops in order to obtain “best practice outcomes” and a clear movement forward to a sustainable system – on behalf of national interests
- Comments below relative to each term:

Terms of Reference Murray Darling Basin Royal Commission SA

1. South Australia is a “Basin State” within the meaning of the *Water Act 2007* (Cth) (“**the Act**”), the Basin Plan made under s.44(3)(b)(i) of the Act, and is a party to the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement (“**the Basin Agreement**”), which forms Schedule 1 to the Act.
2. There exist “Water Resource Plan Areas”, as defined in the Basin Plan, within the State of South Australia. The South Australian River Murray forms the downstream area of the Water Resource Plan Areas outlined in the Basin Plan.
3. The objects and purposes of the Act and the Basin Plan include, but are not limited to, the following matters:

1. ensuring the return to environmentally sustainable levels of extraction for water resources that are over-allocated or over-used;

**Submission:**

Obviously the MDBA has failed in this objective when viewing the current state of the Menindee Lakes and the Darling River. Menindee Lakes are empty, and have been drained twice over the last 5 years. Over 10 years of supply to Broken Hill has been drained through to the SA lakes and out to the sea. Extraction levels in Northern NSW and Southern Queensland have had a massive negative effect on environmental needs.

2. to protect, restore and provide for the ecological values and ecosystem services of the Murray-Darling Basin (taking into account, in particular, the impact that the taking of the water has on the water courses, lakes, wetlands, groundwater and water dependent ecosystems that are part of the Basin water resources and on associated biodiversity);

**Submission:**

In part this has been achieved with SA benefiting from large amounts of water drained from the Menindee lakes system. Protecting, restoring ecological value and ecosystems in one area to the detriment of another is far from an ideal outcome. In fact the majority of flood plains and water dependent ecosystems that form part of the Basin have been ignored when taking of water for irrigation has been prioritised up-stream.

The over-extraction and theft of water, and the inadequate action to instantly retrieve this water clearly damaged ecosystems across the length of the Darling River.

3. the establishment and enforcement of environmentally sustainable limits on the quantities of surface water and groundwater that may be taken from the Basin water resources (including by interception activities);

**Submission;**

The lack of enforcement in the upper-darling and contributories has had significant ramifications downstream. MDBA and some states actively impeded conforming to the plan by failing to follow up enforcement officer concerns of water theft as outlined in the ABC program "Pumped".

Significant flaws in calculating flood plain recovery and evaporation rates along with the illegal collection of surface water from interception banks has resulted in large quantities of water "not available" for environmental sustainability.

4. to give effect to relevant international agreements through the integrated management of Basin water resources;

No comment.

5. to establish a sustainable and long term adaptive management framework for the Basin water resources, that takes into account the broader management of natural resources in the Murray-Darling Basin;

**Submission:**

The Governance of the Murray-Darling Basin is inadequate as it does not include scientists or environmentalist on relevant boards associated with the management and distribution of water.

Boards in the main are made up of Irrigators and representative from interest groups, again mainly large corporates.

6. to optimise social, economic and environmental outcomes arising from the use of Basin water resources in the national interest;

**Submission:**

The objectives and purpose behind the plan has been lost amongst water shifting by large corporates and the unfair preferences given by governments and their administrators to a few large scale irrigation interests. There appears to be no national interest in terms of social or environmental outcomes, and even the economic benefits are only for a few, and not the majority.

7. to achieve certain “enhanced environmental outcomes”.

**Submission:**

To achieve “enhanced environmental outcomes” there needs to be a common “don’t touch” clause that has the following requirements for the “system” to function:

- All rivers to have continuous and un-interrupted flow for the full length
- Water storage systems along the length of the Murray-Darling basin to remain between 60% and 80% capacity, post water distribution to annual plantings
- Increase funding to landholders along river systems to turn flood plains into permanent wetlands. This increased capacity of the river to “breath and clean” itself will add value to the system, both in environmental and capacity outcomes
- Strong and immediate compliance across the entire system, in particular large scale annual crop irrigators

A reference report of interest:

<http://www.farmonline.com.au/story/5403208/drought-myth-holds-murray-darling-back/>