

Murray Darling Basin Plan – Back to Basics

by Neil Eagle

MDBA 5 year Report

- Improvement in environmental health, obviously there would have to be environmental positives in the last 5 years after 10 years of crippling drought. How can MDBA validate this as a consequence of the MDBP?
- MDBA claim that the Basin economy has grown under the Basin Plan. It stands to reason that there would be economic growth as the last 5 to 7 years have been far more favourable seasons, following the crippling drought coupled with improved commodity prices for cattle, wool, fat lambs and harvestable grain crops, for the Non-Irrigation Sector of the Basin.
- For the Irrigation Sector, with the massive depletion of water for productive use, the adverse impact on industries and commodities is profound and on-going.
- The trading of water to high value crops to corporate developments of Horticulture (nuts, wine grapes and cotton), reflects the fact that there are opportunities for large profits to be made out of the misery inflicted on communities.
- A small oversupply of high value crops very quickly become low or no value crops; as happened recently with the wine grape boom under the MIS Schemes.
- The recent prolonged drought, with banks bearing down on struggling farmers, triggered the sale of water in an endeavour to survive. This was made possible due to the Government's action of separating land and water, aimed at that very outcome!

The Facts

- *That the rivers were in decline and over- extracted.* Both have been clearly proven *false* (read reports from: Prof. John Briscoe (Harvard University, USA), Prof. Lee Benson, Prof. Peter Gell, Prof. John Pigram, Jennifer Marahosy, Peter Millington, and David Boyd)
- The House of Representatives' Interim Report into the 'Living Murray' (2004), supported by 10 of the 11 across Party politicians (including our Local Member), concluded that our rivers were in quite good health and *not* in decline, and that *no* water should be taken from production as the science was *not* there to justify such action.
- *In effect the Howard Government, with Turnbull as Water Minister, used the drought to introduce the 2007 Water Act, along with massive monetary commitment to re-direct productive water to supposed environmental need to save the river system.* In reality, it was really to gain votes in South Australian key electoral seats, usurping the

fundamental rights of States over their water (clearly written into the Constitution) and thus sacrificing the Basin's Irrigation Industry developed over the previous century, as the major food-bowl of our Nation.

- In effect, the Plan is based upon delivering 3,000 GLs of additional water down to the South Australian Lower Estuarine Lakes (Alexandrina and Albert) and out to sea. This equates annually to the capacity of Hume Dam, used to maintain Estuarine Lakes as fresh (annual evaporation loss of approximately 1 million MLs), and additional flows over the Barrages and out to sea in a futile aim of keeping the outlet from the Coorong to the sea clear without resorting to dredging (which continues to this day), instead of using the Southern Ocean tidal action. The amount of water required for identified environmental needs is really minimal in the context of the total water recovery.
- Since the CAP imposed in the 1990s, to now under this Basin Plan (if implemented and approved), half the Historic Water use of the Basin will be taken out of production; from an average of 10,000 to 11,000 GLs, down to 5,000 to 6,000 GLs.

Solutions

When common sense prevails in this country, it will finally happen!

Certain things must take place:

1. The 2007 Water Act must be re-drafted. In his report, the late Prof. John Briscoe stated "prior to the 2007 Water Act, Australia was considered the world leader in Arid Zone water management, but has now lost its way and will not regain that position until the 2007 Water Act is re-drafted to once again ensure proper balance between the Socio, Economic and Environmental needs."
2. A weir near Wellington in South Australia must be constructed.
3. The MDBA structure must be reviewed so as the top water and agriculture representatives from each State be appointed as Commissioners without any veto, to more closely resemble the Charter of the previous MDBC.
4. That an active policy of dam building be instigated. Realise that the last major dam construction in Australia was the Dartmouth Dam over 40 years ago. Instead of constructing new dams, our politicians and bureaucrats were duped into believing it would never rain sufficiently again to fill reservoirs (by Tim Flannery), and instead spent billions of dollars constructing desalination plants, which have previously and continue to be, proven white elephants.

It is past time that the leaders of this country (both Federal and State) and agricultural and irrigation representative bodies admitted the massive mistake that has been inflicted on our nation. Furthermore, they should advocate the steps, as listed above, necessary to reverse this disaster inflicted upon the food-bowl of this great nation of ours.