

Murray McClure

Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission
GPO Box 1445,
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Dear Commissioner,

Please find my submission to the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission. We thank you for setting up this commission and giving us the right to submit submissions and appear before you.

Introduction:

I am Murray McClure born on the Darling River in 1940 at the Wilcannia Hospital. Owned a property between Wilcannia and Tilpa, "Trevallyn", taken over from my parents in 1970. The McClure family is now 5th generation living on the Darling River.

I have been a representative on various water committees since 1967. First elected to the Central Darling Shire in 1971. Deputy Shire President and later President (Mayor) until 1990 when I was asked to be part of a NSW Government Agency called the "Darling Electricity Construction Agency (D.E.C.A.). The five members of this agency was to be fully responsible for constructing four thousand kilometres of grid power lines completing the last 20% of NSW that was not connected to the grid. Completed this \$35 million dollar scheme in 1995.

The Central Darling Shire has about one thousand kilometres (1,000) of actual Darling River through the middle of the shire in the Northern Basin of NSW.

In my time living on the Darling River since the 1960's I have seen a gradual decline in water volume passing through the eighty (80) kilometre frontage of the river on "Trevallyn" Station, particularly low to medium flows.

MDBA History:

The M. D. B. A. was set up finally in 2007 following on from the Murray Darling Basin Commission which was initially formed because of concerns of the over allocation of water licences for irrigation throughout the basin. Finally in 2007 the then Federal Government under John Howard put \$10 billion dollars on the table to try to rectify this problem. At that time it was intended to spend \$8 billion dollars on buying back the over allocated licences and \$2 billion dollars on the other water saving measures.

An order of priority was established at that time for the intended use of the recovered water – simply put:

1. **Town Water Supplies**
2. **Stock & Domestic requirements**
3. **Irrigation**

In 2012 agreement to the Murray Darling Basin Plan was agreed to by the involved states and the A.C.T. and over time the amount of money **available** was increased to \$13 billion dollars.

The perception of the Australian Public following the agreement of the States and A.C.T. was to the effect that the M.D.B.A. would now have the power to implement the original **major** intention of the scheme **i.e. to buy back the over-allocation of irrigation water licences. NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH.**

Unfortunately, during the last 5-6 years we have seen the M.D.B.A. only spend approximately \$3 billion dollars on **direct purchases** of actual water licences; the back-bone of the scheme: and about \$6 billion dollars on dubious infrastructure measures to recover water.

This is vastly different to the then intention of the scheme – namely to spend approximately 80 % of the then \$10 billion on direct buy back of the over allocated irrigation licences.

- In some cases, so called “Infrastructure Measures”, costing thousands – if not millions of dollars have been spent by the M.D.B.A. which has actually increased the irrigation licence holders allocation while returning little water to the rivers
- To some intent the addition of the words “**to consider the “Economic and Social”** impacts of the scheme by the M.D.B.A. in purchasing irrigation water licences is open-ended, and can be construed to leave the door open for any recommendations by the N.S.W. and other governments to the M.D.B.A. that may be, in effect, contradictory to the original intent of the scheme.
- It is alleged that recent reviews into the N.S.W. Northern Basin have been incorrectly interpreted by the M.D.B.A. in their recommendations to the Federal Government to reduce the formally agreed to recovery of 390 GL from this basin by 70 GL. The recent dis-allowance of this motion by the Senate only re-affirmed the original intent and agreed to arrangements by the states.
- In recent years the N.S.W. Government have changed the rules in relation to irrigation:
 - 1) **Pump capacities - increased**
 - 2) **Minimum river pumping height levels – lowered**
 - 3) **Irrigation licences (A, B & C) classifications (see references) – enables irrigation licence holders to extract water at lower height and at greatly increased volumes per hour**

All of the above have had a dramatic DOWNWARD effect on low level flows reaching the Darling River – particularly between the towns of Bourke and Menindee; some 1,400 km – 1,500 km of actual river length (see references including ABC Landline TV Program, 15th April, 2018 titled, “Cricket Pitch”).

- The M.D.B.A. has not had either:
 - 1) THE WILL
 - 2) THE RESOURCES
 - 3) THE POWER

To do nothing but accept these changes and obviously include them in recommendations to the Federal Government including legislative changes that are increasingly detrimental to the Barwon/Darling river system.

- The recommendations currently before the Senate amount to a reduction of some 605 GL in the earlier agreed to amount of water to be recovered from over allocation of irrigation licences within the basin – **THIS IS TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE** (see reference Wentworth Group, November Review).
- It is my understanding that the N.S.W. Government is currently constructing a pipeline from Wentworth, N.S.W. to Broken Hill, N.S.W.
I raise the following questions into the necessity of this new pipeline

- A. There already exists a pipeline from Menindee to Broken Hill (shorter than from Wentworth)
- B. Has the Menindee/Broken Hill pipeline deteriorated to such an extent that it needs replacing?
- C. If B (above) is correct why not replace it?
- D. Does the N.S.W. Government believe there will be little water arrive at Menindee during low flows to guarantee water from Menindee to Broken Hill?

ENVIRONMENTAL WATER:

There is a need to clarify the use of environmental water that has been paid for by the M.D.B.A. and stored in headwater storage dams.

- It is my belief that this water should only be used in times of critical need for stock and domestic uses and town water supplies.
- This water should not be made available for irrigation.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

The Barwon Darling River is the only conduit for water from a predominantly summer catchment to compliment the flows in the Murray Darling Basin.

- Why is the section from Mungindi to Menindee unregulated?
- Why was the NSW legislation to put some thirty (30) low level weirs in this section repealed some years ago?

- Proposed amendments to the Murray Darling Basin Plan would use “Supply Measures” to change the already agreed to “Sustainable Diversion Limits” and increase water use for irrigation.
- These proposed supply measures are inconsistent with the Basis Plan and could even be unlawful (Reference The Australia Institute Report April 2018 – Desperate Measures).
- One wonders to what level of the agricultural drop in production must reach through lack of water before the M.D.B.A. attempts to rectify the situation – it may be too late for the section of river from Bourke to Pooncarie.
- It will not be until a full and independent audit is carried out into the NSW Office of Water and the MDB Authority’s transactions and agreements, that many of the critical allegations and actions taken and signed off by the commission will be fully revealed?
- Recent media reports have suggested that some member states may walk away from the scheme following the disallowment motion in the senate relating to the Northern Basin of NSW. Should this happen it may well be possible, through legislation, for the Federal Government to assume control of the whole scheme. (As happened in Tasmania with the proposed "Franklin Dam") With so much of the control of the scheme being invested in the states, the original intention of the formation of the authority has turned into a dogs breakfast. (A mess) Having spent over \$9 billion on the scheme so far it would be a very expensive travesty of justice for the scheme not to be completed. Regardless of some of the member states grandstanding a timely threat of their own by the Federal Government may well be in order.

The original intent of the legislation governing the M.D.B.A. plan is not protected by the Constitution and as such the Member States have the ability to run their own agenda and for their own ends.

It will not be until the Federal Government, through further legislation, if necessary, gives the M.D.B.A enough power to enforce their will upon the Member States, will the ultimate and initial aims of the scheme be achieved.

Thanks for the opportunity to put before this Royal Commission my thoughts. I would be very happy to appear before this Commission to answer any questions or to further explain matters raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Murray McClure

REFERENCES:

