



LIBERAL PARTY OF AUSTRALIA
VICTORIAN DIVISION - MILDURA BRANCH
WATER ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WAC)

Preliminary Submission to the Productivity Commission MDB Plan

The WAC was formed on 6th February 2018.

The WAC's objective is

"To ensure Sunraysia receives its fair share of available water for horticultural, farming, industrial, urban and environmental uses."

The WAC hopes to achieve this objective principally by advising and lobbying State and Federal Coalition MPs.

The membership of the Committee is set out in Appendix 1.

The WAC has considered the Terms of Reference and cannot make detailed submissions in response thereto because of lack of time and resources. The following general remarks on the MDB Plan and MDB Authority are respectfully submitted for what they are worth.

- 1) The WAC's initial assessment of the MDB Plan and MDB Authority are that they are a significant advance on the prior administrative regime applying to the Basin. That regime comprised Federal, State and Territory Water Ministers and was largely ineffectual due to the individual States and Territories wishing to look after their own at the expense of the common good of the Basin.
 - 2) At this point in time the WAC wishes the Plan (as amended) to be implemented. The WAC believes the MDB Authority is well managed. Although the WAC has not carried out a detailed examination of the Plan's administration to date, the WAC believes it is largely on track.
 - 3) The main problem in Sunraysia as seen by the WAC is the possibility of another water shortage, along the lines of that which occurred in the 2009 drought. Water prices escalated and the net effect was that 25% of the Sunraysia pumped irrigation district was dried off. The opinion now is that growers are not as well capitalised as they were in 2009 and the effect could be much worse than 2009.
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- 4) Allied to the matter raised in Paragraph 3) is research done by a Mildura resident, Lindsay Leake, which purports to show that long term inflows are tending to be exceeded by outflows thus placing in doubt “the basic assumptions that the MDA Plan is based on”. The WAC believes that Mr. Leake’s analysis should be carefully checked by experts.

Some credibility is given to Mr. Leake by the decommissioning of Menindee Lakes due the WAC believes to the reduction in inflow.

- 5) Much has been said recently about alleged illegal and/or excessive diversions in the Northern Basin. The WAC urges all States and Territories to ensure all offtakes are metered and regularly monitored, and that penalties for offences be of sufficient magnitude to be effective deterrents.
- 6) The Ernst and Young report “Analysis of Efficiency measures in the Murray-Darling Basin” relating to the recovery of 450gl indicates that a very large proportion of the 450gl is to be recovered from the Goulburn-Murray and Sunraysia Districts. On checking with a knowledgeable contact in Shepparton the writer was advised bluntly that Shepparton and environs could not lose any more water. In Sunraysia much work has been done and only 7gl has been recovered, and it is difficult to see where any more will come from.

North of Swan Hill down through Kerang, Pyramid and Dingee there are large open channels some the size of small rivers which seem to be watering pasture. These channels could be pipelined at huge cost and considerable recovery made.

In this regard WAC notes that a pipeline from the Murray to Broken Hill delivering an estimated 10gl per year will cost in excess of half a billion dollars. The construction cost once expended should be able to be written off over 100 years

- 7) Snowy Hydro 2 has just been announced. Water will be pumped back uphill using off peak power and sent down again when back-up power is required. Water will therefore be retained in the hydro system and will not flow down the rivers (Murrumbidgee and Murray) for use by irrigators, the environment and others. An estimate of the amount of water lost to the river systems should be made. The amount lost could be critical in dry years.
- 8) All indications are that the Plan’s recovery of 2750gl may not be fully achieved and in addition there could be serious problems in dry years. In other words more inflow is probably required in addition to the recovery of 2750 gl. The WAC believes at this early stage in its existence that projects that have been mooted but dismissed as impractical should now be reconsidered. For example the Bradfield scheme to harvest water in the upper reaches of the Clarence and direct them inland.

There is at times abundant water in Queensland some of which may be able to be pumped south.

These schemes will require a paradigm shift with regard to their construction costs but once constructed they should have a long life which would reduce their costs over time.

Members of the Water Advisory Committee as at 31st January 2018

Adrian Kidd – President, Mildura Branch, retired Solicitor, Committee Chairman

Jim Belbin – Vice President of the Committee, LP Member and formerly Chairman First Mildura Irrigation Trust

Greg Milner – Horticulturist

Frank Dimasi – Horticulturist and former Board member, First Mildura Irrigation Trust.

Malcolm Bennett – Horticulturist, Lower Murray Water Director

Cosimo Dichieria – Horticulturist

Maria Riedl – Community Activist

Kerryn Woodward – Pharmacist and LP Member

Russell Lamattina – Engineer & LP Member
