

SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION'S 5 YEAR EVALUATION OF
THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN PLAN.

For the past 40 years I have lived at Point Sturt, adjacent to Lake Alexandrina, and produced beef cattle.

The last drought was a very difficult time for the people living around the Lakes and Coorong, for they were surrounded by the sadness of the environmental disaster occurring around them. After a number of good years, people's spirits lifted, but now people are becoming very edgy, and community confidence is plummeting. This is in response to upstream and political actions which seem totally determined to nibble away at the figures in the Basin Plan so that less water will be allocated to the environment and more removed for irrigation. I am starting to feel that the river flowing through the Murray Darling Basin will gradually become less able to sustain the life and communities dependent upon it.

I wish to address risks to the long term sustainability of the water resource in the Murray Darling Basin.

Recently when I looked through the Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan (2010) In the Section 11.2 Risk allocation, the only risk mentioned was ".....changes to the volume and reliability of entitlement holders' allocations of water between individual entitlement holders and governments."(P 154)

There was no mention of risks to the resource itself.

A lot has changed in the past 8 years. Two dredges have been dredging the Murray Mouth for the past 3 years, and in spite of the MDB Plan's commitment to only have dredging occurring in 1 year in 10, there is no sign they will soon become unnecessary.

Some of the risks to the resource itself are:

1. Discussion about recalibration of the target of dredging the Murray Mouth only one year in ten.
2. The effects of climate change in the MDB.
3. The effects of human population build up and their increased water needs.

4. Continuing pressure to try to appropriate more water for productive use, away from water earmarked for environmental benefit. This is exacerbated by our seemingly irrational rush to give away water NOW, when the offset water saving infrastructure can be implemented up to 10 years later.....if at all. There is no use of the Precautionary Principle here.
5. When making decisions for the use of the River we seem to lose sight that it is a slow moving river travelling through a hot, dry, salty environment. We also seem to lose sight of the three basic characteristics it needs to support human needs. It needs the ability to cope with flood, (an open mouth to enable its escape and prevent excess flooding). It needs to cope with drought, (be wary off too many perennial plantings). It needs to cope with heavy salt loads, requiring adequate flushing water, as well as salt interception schemes.
6. We also need to remember it is a multi-use river, for irrigation as well as fishing, and tourism, A healthy river can give individuals a much needed sense of wellbeing in this fraught world.
7. Add water theft and political collusion to the mix and the River is very much under siege.

All these risks (and there are more) have become much more obvious in the past 5 years, which have made me believe that unless we as a society implement ways of identifying, quantifying and managing these risks, the Murray Darling River will CONTINUE TO BECOME A GRADUALLY DIMINISHING, ONCE VERY VALUABLE, IRRIGATION RESOURCE.

Unfortunately we seem unable to halt this decline. Those near the Mouth will continue to try.

Anne Hartnett