



Wentworth Shire Council

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Our Reference: DOC/18/5446
Your Reference:
Prepared By: Executive Assistant General
Manager
Date: 19 April 2018

Productivity Commission
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WENTWORTH SHIRE COUNCIL SUBMISSION TO THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN: FIVE YEAR ASSESSMENT

Wentworth Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Five Year Assessment of the Murray-Basin Plan and thanks the Commission for travelling to Wentworth as part of the Assessment process to meet with Lower Darling River Stakeholders.

Wentworth is located at the confluence of the Darling and Wentworth Rivers and as such, the region is critically aware of the impact felt by downstream users when changes are made to water resource management plans, operational plans and a lack of inflows.

The long-term sustainable health of both the Darling and Murray Rivers are at the forefront of the minds of our community members.

Council is of the view that there are a number of issues that need to be addressed in regard to the management of the Basin's water resources.

The community continues to raise concern about the lack of communication with stakeholders and ongoing uncertainty in regard to a number of issues, these include:

1. Proposed Menindee Lakes Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Project

Members of the community continue to raise concern about the lack of communication in regard to the Menindee Lakes proposal. To date, there has been no community consultation on the proposal.

Townships, farms and families along the Lower Darling River System are currently experiencing significant water quality issues and preparing for another cease to flow event before the end of the year. The concern amongst the community is that the planned Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism project will effectively kill off the river and Menindee Lakes.

The Anabranch pipeline was put in to secure water for locals, with Lake Cawndilla to supply environmental flows along the Anabranch. The community is concerned that any proposed changes under the proposed SDL Adjustment Mechanism project will mean that there will be no future flows down the Darling River Anabranch.

Additionally, the construction of the Wentworth to Broken Hill pipeline is for the purpose of securing supply to Broken Hill, yet the supply for communities reliant on the Menindee Lakes and Lower Darling River System, including the townships of Menindee, Pooncarie, Ellerslie, and Pomona is subject to ongoing water quality issues due to a decrease in flows in the Barwon-Darling System which has led to higher salinity levels being experienced and longer lasting blue-green algae blooms.

The expected outcome looks bleak and our farmers are reporting an inability to plan long term, or even get information or be consulted about their particular issues.

2. Compliance and Monitoring

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There continues to be concern amongst the community about the inequity in metering requirements amongst valleys within the Basin. The issue of a lack of metering in the Northern Basin (particularly in the northern NSW section) must be considered as a matter of urgency. Additionally, effective telemetry systems and increase in agency resources to monitor take, must be addressed. Self – monitoring and self- reporting must not be permitted without another level of scrutiny by agencies being possible.

Telemetry enabled meters are already installed in various parts of the Southern Basin and there is no reason as to why this technology should not be encouraged as part of a Basin wide roll out. Consistent standards for metering would assist in better planning and a better understanding of the resource.

A 'no meter no pump' approach is strongly supported by communities in this region.

Furthermore, protection of low flows in the rain dependent Barwon-Darling River System is being called for, as per the previous Water Sharing Plan for the Barwon-Darling River System. The embargo system needs to be reinstated to protect low flows and shepherded down the system into the Menindee Lakes, to ensure that basic human needs are met.

3. Environmental Water

The purchase of water entitlements from the Tandou operation has raised concern about its efficacy and the way in which it was undertaken. On the back of the ANAO report, there is a perception of political expediency between federal and state departments, resulting in a "...fantastic deal.." for Webster.

Future purchase of environmental water should be considered in the context of valley requirements and whole of system watering plans in the future.

That Irrigators are pumping without meters, taking environmental flows and pumping during embargoes is frustrating and that nothing has been done is concerning.

There seems to be inflexibility when it comes to consulting about impacts along the lower Darling, yet all resources given to create diversion works preventing natural catchment and connectivity to and along the river systems, even retrospectively legalising works previously deemed illegal.

Council is supportive of a triple bottom line approach to the management of the Basin's water resources. Healthy rivers are critical to the future of our environmental, economical, and social well-being.

Our communities and local agency staff have decades of local knowledge on the river systems in our region, which they are only too happy to share. Council encourages water resource managers to utilise this resource as much as possible.

If you have any further questions or wish to have any further evidence please do not hesitate to contact Wentworth Shire Council.

Yours sincerely

Peter Kozlowski
GENERAL MANAGER