

## Natural Resources Commission Murrumbidgee WSPlan review

Dear Sir,

I spent almost five years on the Murrumbidgee River Management Committee under the excellent Chair Professor Kath Bowmer with members from all the various interest groups in the Murrumbidgee Valley consulting widely with communities along the length of the Murrumbidgee river and came up with a water sharing plan that was agreed to by all groups on the committee. The plan took into account environmental, cultural and economic values that were important to the community and resulted in a 5% reduction in water availability to the irrigation industry.

Subsequently, to make good a promise the NSW Premier made to environmental groups (this promise was conveyed to me by the ACF representative on the committee) that the reduction to irrigator long term water consumption be at least 10% a "Ministers Plan" was hastily developed to make good that commitment. To this end I can only comment on the Ministers Plan which was implemented with very little community input.

My family has a long history (140 years) as river landholders on the Murrumbidgee.

1... Environmental success has been non-existent. The river is still full of non-native European carp, the floodplains are covered with lupin and other non-native vegetation. Wetlands are still the same except where some Commonwealth water has been diverted and these have shown some artificial improvement. All the environmental water accounts held in the dams have just been released with no environmental, cultural, social or economic benefit.

2....Any social outcomes are not measurable.

3... I don't believe the Aboriginal community has even used the water made available.

4....Economic damage is everywhere with much less irrigated agricultural product. Just in the Narrandera area three large potato farms have closed down and nearly all commodity crops have been significantly reduced in area and output. Irrigation output in my area has been reduced by at least 50%. The significant reduction in water availability has led to a lot of water trading when the trade value exceeds crop margins or the cost of growing smaller areas. We are now seeing reductions in crops that need secure water availability every year. This is the end result of political intervention with the introduction of Management plans that have no or very little local input.

5... The Ministers plan has met the objective of reducing irrigated agricultural output and probably gaining political support from the environmental groups. I couldn't see any other meaningful objectives.

6... There are no measurable improved outcomes.

The Natural Resources Commission, now that the political imperatives have passed, can take a new and novel approach and now reinstate the original River Management Committee decision and deliver some meaningful outcomes to river management. To ignore the community input is to make your continued existence irrelevant.

Over the past 70 years there have been a series of reports into things that would improve the management of the Murrumbidgee River and almost none of them have been implemented. The Yanko Creek system except for a few small exceptions is still the same as it was 120 years ago. It should have been upgraded 40 years ago but the State water management system now based in

Sydney does nothing and will continue doing nothing unless organisations such as yours makes some significant recommendations in that direction.

I and others have made representation to State water and Water NSW to have the algal blooms in the weir pools dispersed and they simply refuse to make a simply design change to the weirs, even though there has been suggestions that blue green algae is linked to Motor Neurone Disease. Surely they don't need scientific evidence to make these simple and inexpensive changes to weir operations. This do nothing approach has been part and parcel of river management for too long. If they can't and won't do anything then recommend someone else, preferably in the valley, manage the river.

The basis for all these river management plans is the IQQM model which was designed by the Dept of Water Resources and funded by Murrumbidgee irrigators through the Murrumbidgee River Management Board. After four years of development a peer review group of four hydrologists said the model was basically useless. It was found that the model could not predict floods or droughts and that the data prior to 1970 was so unreliable that a mathematical formula had to be used to replace the lack of reliable data. Despite this water authorities still use variations to the model to make management decisions. I would like to see the commission advocate a return to the common sense approach to river management with all aspects getting equal importance. The move to have administration of river management located in metropolian areas leads to all sorts of problems eg the mismanagement of Menindee Lakes and Bundigerry creek which lead to large fishkills which could have been avoided by local managers . We could have certainty in irrigated food production which would lower the price by increasing supply. This management uncertainty is restricting investment in the industry.

Yours faithfully

Rel Heckendorf