

From: Narrawa Seeds <narrawaseeds@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, 7 June 2023 1:25 PM
To: NRC
Subject: Murrumbidgee River Water Plan
Attachments: IMG_2798 (002).jpg; MDBA Spending

Dear Sir/Madam,

I own a property at Borambola with significant river frontage to the Murrumbidgee River and a General Security Water Allocation. The property was purchased by my husband in July 2015. He has since passed away. In 2016 we experienced some riverine flooding for about eight weeks. This restricted access to forty percent of the property and inundated small areas of land with pasture losses and the inability to utilise and manage the river flats during that period.

In 2021 we experienced prolonged and significant flooding issues. River levels were managed to keep high river flows and constant inundation of our property occurred. The effects were significant. Forty percent of the property was inaccessible for much of the year, pasture and crop losses were high, river red gums toppled, and riverbanks were eroded. Cattle were stranded across the waters, heifers drowned getting caught in debris flowing through the property whilst trying to cross the waters, conception rates were poor due to the inability to get bulls in and out through the waters, we had heavy losses of pasture and inputs, weed infestations and animal health issues including pneumonia, ringworm and then pinkeye when we were finally able to access some country. Grazing in rank grass scratches the cornea and opens the eye to infection.

When the waters receded, we had huge fish kills- dead carp and cod caught on gravel banks or in stagnant ponds, weeds: Bathurst burr, Nagoora Burr, Bull rushes, heliotrope, docks, blackberries, thistles, and a myriad of weeds we had spent the past five years eliminating.

During the Summer we were unable to use our irrigation system because we could not get across the water to service and fuel the irrigation pump. We had to agist cattle off farm for significant periods of time.

2022 began and we were stuck in the same cycle- unable to access forty percent of the property, huge pasture losses, issues with animal health issues. In April, my son sent me an article from The Land newspaper asking for submissions to the Reconnecting River Country Program. At this point I had never heard of it. A little googling and some answers were found. I put in a submission outlining our difficulties with dam and river management. I did a lot of research. River flows at Wagga Wagga were consistently higher than the 22,000Mgs/day that was the current practice and dam levels were being maintained at extraordinary highs.

In May 2022 I attended the DPIE Water Strategies Meeting in Wagga. At the time, and at the close of the irrigation season, Burrinjuck Dam was at 95% capacity and Blowering Dam was at 99% capacity. See first attachment above. I could not believe the stupidity of this as we headed into a third La ninja year. I implored the personnel present (predominantly DPIE staff) to see the foolishness of this. After the meeting I spoke with an ABC journalist and warned her that " Armageddon was coming". We all knew that the first major rain in the hills and that the spill and flooding would come!! There had been many opportunities to reduce dam levels, allow for air space and effectively prevent massive flooding from occurring.

At the same time, the Reconnecting River Country Program was "ramping" up and we were asked to attend webinars about fish, frogs, trees, wetlands, river modelling and cultural water for the indigenous. There was NO consideration for landholders along the river to outline the program and the potential impacts on landholders. By their own admission in one of the Water Modelling webinars, hundreds of millions of dollars had already been spent on the water modelling but those impacted most significantly, those landholders who rightfully bought the land and water, who nurture it and work it, who see themselves as custodians of the land for future generations (much like the indigenous) had not received a cent nor the respect of having meaningful dialogue. The DPIE, Water NSW/ Reconnecting River Country / NSW Government through their own Water Modelling knew which landholders would be most affected, they had our contact details, and they chose not to have a dialogue.

August 5th, 2022, a big rain event occurred in the hills resulting in massive spills from Burrinjuck Dam. We lost kilometres of fencing, large numbers of cattle(with many still stranded in the water), river pumps, solar systems and pasture and crop which had cost us dearly to put in as fertiliser, diesel and chemical prices were at an all-time high. Was the severity of flooding necessary? Absolutely not- leaving air space in dams at the close of the irrigation season and prior to winter rainfall in la ninja years would have reduced the severity of the flooding. The mismanagement of dam and river levels in the lead up to a significant rain event exacerbated the event. We boated across the property, had helicopters doing fodder drops, had a team of men with working dogs help us extract stranded cattle and fumed silently.

Sadly, this event was a prelude to continual and even more significant flooding with 60% of the property under water or inaccessible from August 5 to December 12, 2022. Crops and pastures lost, more animals lost with health issues, massive weed infestations, roads damaged and timber strewn up against fence lines and across paddocks. When Agriculture and Beef Cattle enterprises were at an all-time high, we were being hammered, agisting cattle off farm and rolling from one event to the next.

The costs of water management issues are huge to individuals, communities, and the taxpayers- too huge to list but environmental damage in the felling of huge river red gums, fish kills, bank erosion, sand silting, animal losses and then fiscal costs in government grants for flood affected areas across a huge number of LPAs in NSW , Victoria and South Australia only touch the surface. I have often wondered how MDBA/ DPI/ Reconnecting River Country/NSW Government staff feel about the decision making and results of the Water Management Strategies currently practised. Are they working effectively? Do they take into consideration all stake holders? Or is concern just for the fish and the frogs-even the indigenous? Even the Menindee Lakes fish kill sagas suggest there is a serious problem with the river system being managed by humans. Too little water flow through the Lakes, too much water flow through the lakes! The South Australians are pushing for huge river flows across the border but when they get them, they are screaming about flooding issues!

Never will I forget my children taking leave from their employment, rowing in boats and kayaks trying to rescue animals or dragging out carcasses of drowned animals for them to be buried. I will never forget the endless nights and days tracking dam and river levels; the late night or early morning runs to remove cattle and infrastructure from at risk areas when possible.

2023 has seen river levels drop to lows that are unbelievable. Some of us cannot use our irrigation systems because the river is too low. We are being hammered by all sorts of groups about biosecurity which we cannot practice as we still cannot fence some boundaries and because our neighbours' cattle are traversing across what remains of the Murrumbidgee on a regular basis. Meanwhile the dams above us- Burrinjuck and Blowering sit at 87% capacity and 91% respectively.

We are busy trying to erect fencing, eradicate weeds(couch, Bathurst burr, Nagoora Burr, thistles, Lipia and Heliotrope(amongst a myriad of other species)). We are burning off timber strewn across paddocks and against fences and cleaning up majestic River Red gums fallen by flooding. Every flooded paddock has had to be speed tilled, harrowed, and sprayed repeatedly for weeds due to the bulk of dry matter covered by silt that was impenetrable with no tilling farming practices.

MDBA/reconnecting Rivers/DPIE/WaterNSW/NSW Government.... All have failed miserably with long term and irreparable damage from an environmental, agricultural, and human perspective. There has been NO balance and very little care.

Going forward, with forty percent of our property inaccessible due to riverine flooding(for the frogs, the fish, the trees and the cultural water for the indigenous) according to Flood Modelling done by Reconnecting River Country Program personnel, and forty percent of our most viable country, our property in the long term is not viable as a business, land value is depreciating when land values are appreciating at historical highs. There is NO solution offered by MDBA/Reconnecting River Country/DPIE/Water NSW/or the NSW Government. No communication, no resolution, no mitigation... just massive human, financial, environmental, and emotional losses. Hundreds of thousands of dollars spent(SEE attachment 2) on cleaning offices and absolutely NO CARE for the affected landholders.

The constant and prolonged flooding we have experienced along the Murrumbidgee is replicated along the Murray River, The Goulburn River in Victoria, The Darling River etc etc. The common denominators are: FULL DAMS (ignoring scientific data that we were entering another la ninja event), fish, and frogs prior to those who produce fibre and protein for a world with increasing needs, throwing out “ the baby with the bathwater” without thought for the consequences and , care for all those except those who truly care for the land and water they own.

So.... Specifically, to answer your questions:

1. To what extent do you believe the plan has contributed to environmental outcomes? Dismally
2. To what extent do you think the plan has contributed to social outcomes? Dismally

3. To what extent do you think the plan has contributed to Aboriginal cultural outcomes? I am not sure, but the scales are weighed too heavily in favour of this.
 4. To what extent do you believe the plan has contributed to economic outcomes? Absolutely failed.
 5. To what extent do you think the plan has contributed to meeting its objectives? Very poorly
 6. What changes do you believe are needed to the water sharing plan to improve outcomes?
- a) Landholders should be seen as significant stakeholders along with the fish, the frogs, trees, wetlands and the indigenous community, and meaningful engagement should occur with landholders **early** in the process of potential change.
 - b) We should NEVER throw the baby out with the bath water. Environments/economics/Climates change from year to year/ decade to decade. Cycles are a reality.
 - c) We should utilise scientific data to make decisions along with consultative communication and historical data.
 - d) Total economic outcomes should be considered.. not just a response to fringe groups or decisions made by bureaucrats who never or rarely step outside the office.
 - e) We should learn from mistakes, admit errors, and adjust plans accordingly.
 - f) Decision makers should have to get “ on ground” to see the results of the decision making so that they understand the full implications.
 - g) There should be accountability from an economic standpoint for the spending of taxpayer’s money. Go back to the second attachment and look at the spending MDBA are making!! In an uncertain economic environment, much of this is hard to justify and the obscenity of it is frightening. \$363,000 for cleaning the offices???
 - h) Open and honest communication with ALL stakeholders, not just fringe groups or environmental crusaders or agriculturalists.. a collaborative and encompassing conversation which is transparent and honest.
 - i) If government decision making is going to make farms/business no longer viable, there needs to be a buyout scheme to enable landholders to survive and grow their business elsewhere. Landholders devastated by poor decision making, and decision making for minority groups, should be compensated for losses.

Yours Sincerely

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The Natural Resources Commission will probably say that decisions regarding dam and river levels are outside their parameters. Talk to Reconnecting Rivers Country Program and they will say they are not operating yet(despite the millions of dollars spent), Water NSW will say dam management is not their role, The Federal Ministers will tell you that although they funded many of the programs it is a NSW Government responsibility, talk to NSW Government ministers and they will say it is the responsibility of a variety of groups. There is no group or body standing up and working together with landholders. I would guess the responses will be the same in Victoria and in other states. The reality is that all these bodies: MDBA, Water NSW, NSW Government, Reconnecting River Country program have a partial responsibility in the poor outcomes, but they can avoid responsibility by using terms such as: sustainable/environmental/climate change/cultural water and that makes all okay. We are fiddling with nature, trying to recreate natural events that are unnatural, and the results are catastrophic for the fish, the trees, the river banks, landholders, irrigators, etc etc

Some would say that this letter is too emotional: the reality is that it is the truth!

Yours Sincerely

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State Dam Storages

State	Current Volume (ML)	% of Total Capacity	
		May 1 st , 2023	May 1 st , 2022
SHARED			
Home dam	2,623,604	88 %	90 %
Darbinmouth dam	3,715,330	96 %	92 %
Remender lakes total (Darling river)	3,463,364	85 %	112 %
NSW			
Wyongalla dam	1,193,682	98 %	93 %
Blowering dam	1,326,837	83 %	91 %
Barragook dam	785,383	78 %	91 %
Glenbawn dam	744,606	99 %	98 %
VIC			
Edalen	3,132,633	84 %	75 %
Epsomick	136,423	91 %	88 %
QLD			
Yarves falls dam	461,113	101 %	97 %
Burdekin Falls dam	1,879,292	101 %	104 %
Trond Range dam	361,360	100 %	94 %
Waterford dam	287,713	70 %	70 %
WA			
Agulis dam (art river)	13,074	100 %	10000 %

Major Irrigated Commodity International Pricing Indicators

Commodity	India	Japan	UK/USA	France	China	Russia	South	Latin
Wheat	1,175	10,000	100,000	1,411	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
Barley	1,175	10,000	100,000	1,411	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
Maize	1,175	10,000	100,000	1,411	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
Soybean	1,175	10,000	100,000	1,411	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
Canola	1,175	10,000	100,000	1,411	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 4 April 2023 5:20 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: MDBA Spending
Attachments: senate-order-on-entity-contracts-listing-for-1-january-2022-to-31-december-2022.pdf

<https://www.mdba.gov.au/publications/governance/senate-order-contracts-2022>

The Murray Darling Basin Authority has signed off on 182 consultancies and contracts, worth \$109 million - including more than \$500,000 to keep its offices clean.

[A list tabled with the Senate](#) last month shows the MDBA awarded PricewaterhouseCoopers \$27.4m last year to help upgrade its river modelling, while the Tati Tati Kaiejin indigenous group was awarded the smallest contract of \$101,310 to investigate the impacts of climate change.

Even the cost of cleaning was listed, with Kamberra Indigenous Cleaning awarded \$363,064 over two years to keep head office spick and span, while in Mildura Busy Bee cleaning will get \$155,150 and Griffith Cleaning Arts another \$112,662 over three years.

Most of the contracts in the 2022 list involved the MDBA paying consultancies for support staff, while others were signed on to try and boost community engagement.

Online engagement group Bang the Table has a five-year contract worth \$280,900 to deliver an “online engagement platform”, while others such as Ethos Consulting were awarded \$360,000 over three years to provide report writing services.

The MDBA is also paying \$1.375m to the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations for five years of advice on cultural flows, \$211,970 to STEM Matters for science communications, \$180,000 to Yellowscope to assist in preparing the 2023-24 budget and \$110,000 for a finance health check by Darren Box Pty Ltd.

The MDBA’s annual report also shows that while the MDBA spent \$36.3m on employee costs in 2021-22, it paid out \$107m to suppliers, plus another \$20.8m in grants.

An MDBA spokeswoman said contractors and consultants provided “critical capability where inhouse resources are not sufficient to support delivery of the MDBA’s work program”.

More Coverage

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[Murray River politics choking irrigators \\$230m per year](#)
