Australian Citizens Party

Craig Isherwood, National Secretary
PO Box 376, COBURG, VIC 3058
Phone: 1800 636 432 **Email:** info@citizensparty.org.au **Web:** citizensparty.org.au

MEDIA RELEASE

13 December 2019

Demand real Murray-Darling solution

Tearing up the disastrous Murray-Darling Basin Plan is essential to save Australian agriculture. Dam levels across the entire basin are at only 33 per cent capacity and yet we're only at the start of summer. Until we recover from this crisis, not one drop of water should be wasted on "environmental flows", which would never occur naturally during a drought anyway. Water held by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder must be made available to save agriculture and ensure rural towns do not run out of water. Howls of protest from vested financial interests profiting from water speculation and their ecologist cohorts can be expected. At a time when the farmers who provide our food are struggling to stave off bankruptcy, and much too often resort to suicide, those howls should be treated with contempt.

A real Murray-Darling Basin solution requires the following measures:

- Repeal Malcolm Turnbull's *Water Act 2007*, which initiated the Basin Plan.
- End speculation on water prices immediately. Prohibit water trading for anyone not owning farming land, as was the case prior to 1 July 2014, when only entitlement owners could buy and sell water allocations.
- Open SA's Lake Alexandrina to the ocean by removing the Goolwa Barrages. Around 900 gigalitres (GL) of water per year needlessly evaporates from Lake Alexandrina and the adjacent Lake Albert.
- Build the Clarence River Scheme, which will *add* around 1,000 GL/year of water to the Murry-Darling Basin, generate hydroelectricity and provide flood mitigation for Grafton.
- Upgrade Lake Burrinjuck on the Murrumbidgee River from its present 1,028 GL capacity to 4,000 GL, which would create a reservoir eight times the size of Sydney Harbour.

Basin Plan advocates claimed farmers and irrigators used too much water. But "over-extraction" is a myth! Prior to the Basin Plan regime, an average of 13,623 GL, as reported by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), was extracted from the basin's rivers annually, which was mostly used for agriculture. This amounted to only 42 per cent of the total water inflows in the Basin. Therefore, 58 per cent of total surface water in the Basin was untouched. The Basin Plan legislated to cut surface water extractions by 2,750 GL—a massive 20 per cent cut, which is destroying our once-proud agricultural heartland.

The Basin Plan has created a man-made drought, as filmmaker Chris "Topher" Field's "The MDBA's Man Made Drought" makes clear for the layman. Topher's videos are now going viral; even some of the mainstream media are reporting on them. As he notes, the MDBA has been given a budget of $13 billion for the purpose of taking water off our farmers and giving it to the environment. In Topher's "The MDBA's Zombie Water" short video, he exposes the MDBA's insane goal of "ensuring the mouth of the River Murray is open without the need for dredging in at least 95 per cent of years, with flows every year through the Murray Mouth Barrages". This requires massive amounts of water and man-made floods, and doesn't work anyway. In its attempt to achieve this goal in 2016, the MDBA ordered massive water releases, including from the Menindee Lakes. Did they open the Murray mouth? Yes, but dredging resumed within a few days as the Southern Ocean again overpowered the Murray. As the early explorers discovered, the Murray mouth was often closed, naturally. Topher made a third short video, "The source of the MDBA problem", explaining why Lake Alexandrina should be returned to an estuary as it was naturally in the first place.

What about the environment?

Long before European settlement, and the development of irrigation infrastructure that transformed the basin into Australia's food bowl, the Murray and Darling rivers often dried out. This was not unusual before the Hume Dam was completed in 1936. For example, in 1923 Victoria's water commissioner Ronald East was photographed at Nyah (near Swan Hill) standing astride the Murray River, which was just a tiny trickle. Many other photographs show horses and carts in a dry Murray riverbed. Wildlife, including fish etc. bounced back when the floodwaters returned.

So-called "environmental flows" often cause environmental destruction as evidenced in the numerous reports of riverbank erosion. Water is wasted in swamps and out to sea. Such swamps are protected as "wetlands", but most wetlands did not exist naturally anyway. An April 2018 report for the North Central Catchment Management Authority, "Gunbower Forest Wetlands–Paleoecological History",

makes this clear: “Only eight wetlands sediment records extend into Indigenous time and the typical sediment rate ranged between 0.5-3 mm/yr. Most wetlands experienced net sediment accumulation only after the time since widespread river regulation (post 1922).” In summary, the records suggest, “during indigenous times, these wetlands were dry so frequently (3-7 times/decade) that no net sediment accumulation occurred”.

Water Resources Minister David Littleproud must resign. As a banker and with a track record of opposing needed water infrastructure and supporting the Basin Plan to “give farmers certainty”, he’s the wrong man for the job. Farmers need the certainty of progress, not the certainty of bankruptcy.

Click here for a free copy of the CEC’s *New Citizen* special report, “The Infrastructure Road to Recovery”.

Printed from http://citizensparty.org.au/print/pdf/node/567, on 28 Mar 2024 at 11:03 pm