

This letter is signed  
by the following  
organisations

**Upper Goulburn  
River Catchment  
Association**



**Central Murray  
Environmental  
Floodplains Group  
Inc**



**Sunraysia Citrus  
Growers Inc**



**The Hon. Keith Pitt MP**  
Federal Water Minister  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Canberra ACT 2600

[Keith.pitt.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:Keith.pitt.mp@aph.gov.au)

May 4, 2020

Cc: All Ministerial Council Members

Dear Ministers,

As the May Ministerial Council meeting quickly approaches, what must be at the forefront of the minds of all those involved is the fact that rain is not going to solve the problems of water management and the inequities of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

While good rains will bring relief to some, there are many staple food producers who are still being crippled by the imbalances that water reform has created. These very same food producers are the ones who in the past have ensured that our nation up until now has not run out of staple foods, such as wheat and rice. The issues which COVID 19 have brought to the attention of the nation have been bubbling away, but have been brought to the surface thanks to the impacts on global trade.

Ministers, when you gather in May you must put politics aside and focus your efforts on identifying what is in the best interests to protect our staple food producers, the nation's food security, creating jobs and wealth, while at the same time not undermining environmental health.

We remind you that the Murray Darling Basin Plan was sold to regional communities as a flexible and adaptive plan with a triple bottom line to balance economical, social and environmental needs. There have been over a hundred of inquiries, investigations, reports, senate inquiries, many revealing the shortcomings of the plan- the socio-economic impact on regional communities, the environmental degradation, the destruction of irrigation farming enterprises and with it agricultural production, yet we continually fail to see any meaningful revision and adaptive management.

The Sustainable Diversion Limit and every other facet of the Basin Plan has been modelled and calculated on long-term climate historical data from 1895- 2009, which is no longer relevant due to the dramatic step-change in climate with higher temperatures, a change in seasonal rainfall patterns and vastly reduced basin inflows as stated in the recent Keelty report. Recent analysis shows that median annual basin inflows have reduced by 50% in the last 20 years. Also within this 20 year time frame the catastrophic bushfires of 2006-07 in the High

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Country, the Black Saturday fires of 2009 and the 2020 bushfire have all significantly impacted the basin catchments and inflows and will continue to do so for the next 100 years.

It is essential and should be the Ministers highest priority to establish a fairer basis to share the increasing load of conveyance water, so that it is not only the irrigators consumptive pool that bears the entire burden to run the river, thus reducing their allocations. This run of the river water is essentially environmental water and beneficial to the riverine environment.

In addition, we implore the Ministerial Council members to cease further implementation of the Basin Plan, conduct a complete overhaul so that the remaining funds are spent wisely to protect the future of this country. Minco must take the initiative to direct the MDBA:

1. To immediately review the Sustainable Diversion Limit as it is obvious it is not sustainable for staple food production. We need irrigated agriculture to achieve sustainable production and provide food security in critical times. Currently rice, flour milling wheat and dairy production in eastern Australia is unsustainable and this is due to basin policies. The current SDL does not reflect the current inflows and climatic conditions.
2. To analyse the impacts of reduced flows from the Northern Basin on water availability in the Southern Connected System (SCS) and undertake a complete review of reduced inflows in the entire SCS where reports indicate inflows have reduced by 50%. An honest appraisal of this reduction on food producers and basin regional communities must be made public.
3. To undertake an independent assessment to comprehensively confirm which, if any of the Schedule 5 'enhanced environmental outcomes', are realistically achievable.
4. To justify why the 'relaxed' Constraints Strategy Projects should continue to proceed when it is known that these projects cannot meet the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 timeframe under the Phase 2 Assessment Guidelines Section 3.1
5. Direct the Federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to cease advertising for the recovery of the 450GL upwater, as both NSW and Victoria have stated that no more water will be removed from their states' water entitlements. It is therefore impossible to obtain the upwater and it is also impossible to deliver it to SA.

The Basin Plan under the Water Act enshrines in legislation aspirational environmental targets which can never realistically be achieved, such as the delivery of 80,000ML/day to the SA border and the proposal to keep the Murray

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Mouth open 95% of time without dredging. It is time that this legislation was amended.

The environment currently holds 3979 GL of entitlements in the Southern Connected System alone. This is across all water holders with recovered water both pre and post 2009. It has been stated in 2016 that the CEWH can achieve the set ecological targets throughout the basin with the 2750GL parameters.

The MDBA maintain there will be a review of their climate change policy in 2026, that is far too late. We need flexibility and adaptive management right now.

We respectfully request that this letter is tabled at the upcoming Ministerial Council meeting this month.



Yours sincerely,

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On behalf of

Organisations listed

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