

2 July 2022

Barwon-Darling Water Sharing Plan amendments
Department of Planning and Environment—Water

RE: Submission regarding the Draft Barwon Darling Watercourse Water Resource Plan

To whom it may concern

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Barwon Darling Watercourse Water Resource Plan (WRP).

Our family have been landholders on the Lower Darling since the 1880's. Six generations of our family have lived on the Lower Darling and been able to rely on regular water flow to sustainably run a successful grazing enterprise. We believe this gives us a rare insight into this important part of the Darling river system. Our family company currently owns and operates █ livestock properties in the Western Division, █ of these properties rely on fresh water being supplied from Menindee Lakes to the Lower Darling and a 4th one relies on the Menindee - Broken Hill pipeline.

The properties on the LD are situated approximately █ south of Menindee. We can go through family history for 5 generations without seeing any water quality problems like we have seen in the last 17 or so years. In 2005 we had to put down a bore for stock & domestic water. Prior to this (from 1880 to 2005) there was never any need to have a bore for stock & domestic consumption as there had previously always been enough supply of good quality water for property use from the Lower Darling River.

Since 2002 we have seen around 5 extended cease to flows which cause high salinity and blue green algae issues. The blue green algae issue then renders the water unusable for our stock and domestic purposes. The most recent cease to flow was also worsened by the presence of dead and dying fish as various waterholes dried up.

The most recent incarnation of the BD WSP has seen the addition of a 195 GL storage target for water held at the Menindee Lakes, at first glance this would seem like a small improvement for Lower Darling reliability.

After further discussions with the department in Menindee it was revealed that 195 GL of "active" storage was put forward by Water NSW as an achievable outcome. 195 GL whilst sounding generous is basically 10% of capacity Menindee Lakes full level. If the 195 GL active storage was available in 1 lake (Pamamaroo) when the Lakes fell to this level it is conceivable that it could represent 12 months supply to the Lower Darling. However if the active storage was spread across the 4 lakes, total 195 active storage is not likely to last more than 3 months, especially if it is heading into summer. This conceivably could cause fish kills within 3 months of hitting the 195GL target both within the lakes and in the Lower Darling itself.

The prediction becomes even worse if the 195GL is total storage. Under this scenario it could be expected that the Lower Darling would cease to flow the moment the 195 GL was hit with very little active water available to the township of Menindee and Lower Darling. It would depend on which lake the active water was stored in, but there is no mention of where it is to be stored in the plan.

It is my opinion that a target of 18 months supply at Menindee is required to bring back some reliability and integrity to the water supply for those living south of Bourke, through to Wentworth. This is less than the original 21 months supply at Menindee as was seen in the pre

2012 plans but more than the 195GL storage proposed. The predictions I've seen for 18 months supply range between 300 to 400 GL of active supply held in Lake Pamamaroo. This must be a consideration if DPIE wish to comply with the Water Management Act.

It was also revealed the Ministers office had chosen to change the "active" storage outcome to "total" storage. This change of wording means any hope of a viable outcome for the Menindee Lakes and Lower Darling with a 195GL total storage is non-existent. A large part of 195GL total storage would be dead storage. It would mean a whole lot more cease to flows between Bourke and Wentworth and a death sentence to the Environment, Indigenous culture, tourism, grazing and many family owned businesses.

Having the ministers office intervene on such an important figure, brings back memories of 2012 when a minister interfered, to solely benefit upstream irrigators and the ministers interference was later sent to ICAC for investigation. It would seem this time the reasoning is the same, to protect low security irrigation water ahead of Town water supplies, Stock and Domestic water supplies and High Security water supplies, all of which are listed as priorities under the Water Management act. It would also reduce access to water for cultural practices of the Indigenous nations along the length of River from Bourke to Wentworth. The minister refusing to allow a target of active storage at Menindee, really can only be described as nepotism towards a few "special" irrigators in the BDWSP area.

Under the current BDWSP first flush rules only 30GL needs to pass through Bourke then pumping can commence with irrigators able to access up to 300% of their annual take. Once the 30GL has passed Bourke the door is now open to pump the Barwon Darling irrigator allocation of 195GL x 300% = 470GL plus the extra proposed FPH allocations, without any consideration to get 60GL of water to Menindee. The 60GL is a part of the MLDWSP but has no mention in the BDWSP which is the major water supply for Menindee, its absurd such oversight can be condoned. Once again nepotism towards a few irrigators, whilst hundreds of other individuals, groups, businesses, and the environment are neglected downstream of Bourke.

This will mean a very sad and slow end to our family farming operation. It will also mean a similar fate for Indigenous culture, towns, native fish species, native animals, ancient native trees and all things in the Riverine Environment that rely on fresh regular flows

The Barwon-Darling Water Sharing Plan should include provision to get water to the Murray Junction, under the first flush rule. By only attempting to get some small flows to Willcanda before extractions resume is insanity from DPIE. It really leads me to ask just how much consideration is being given to Towns, Stock and Domestic, Cultural, High Security Water Licences, Wildlife, Fish and the Riverine environment downstream of the Barwon-Darling WSP. Your current proposal suggest that no consideration is given.

Finally, these documents are called Water Sharing Plans, it seems some departmental staff maybe overlooking the word "Sharing" and just putting together Water Plans, with no thought to connectivity between Valleys!

Regards

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