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# **Submission**

to

# **The Murray Darling Basin Authority**

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on

# **The Murray Darling Basin Plan**

Compiled for Clarence Environment Centre  
by John Edwards  
Honorary Secretary  
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# Submission to Murray Darling Basin Plan

## Preamble

The Clarence Environment Centre has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 22 years, and has a proud record of environmental advocacy for biodiversity conservation, for which river health is paramount. In recent years we have written submissions and letters on that Plan and on a number of Murray Darling related matters, not least of which were in opposition to plans to divert the Clarence River to boost flows in the Basin.

As an environment group this submission will concentrate on one salient point, a plea for common sense to prevail, which is the critical need to maintain the ecological health of the entire Murray Darling system. If that impacts on irrigation dependent communities, mining, or other commercial interests, so be it. We cannot cater for a minority, and in so doing risk the collapse of the system, something that will impact, not only on all other current residents of the basin and beyond, but all generations of Australians that follow.

The science has been released, and we know what is needed to reverse the environmental declines resulting from past mismanagement, so we must not miss this opportunity to right those wrongs, and return the system to health.

## Planning for failure

Unfortunately, the obvious attempt at compromise by the Murray Darling Authority, that will see a mere 2,750 gigalitres released back into the river under the new plan, is disappointing. This is only half the amount recommended by the scientists that were employed to determine how much water the system needs to function properly.

This is clearly a compromise to try to avoid any repetition of the ugly scenes perpetrated by a rowdy, and let's face it, selfish minority who put short term self-interest before long term environmental health, a minority that somehow feel they have a greater right to the water than the environment or the remaining 2.3 million Basin residents.

Irrigation, particularly of 'water-hungry' crops like cotton and rice, in the centre of the world's driest continent, makes no sense at all. It simply takes critical water flows from a struggling river system to the detriment of wetlands, fish stocks, water birds, and all other organisms that contribute to biodiversity, without which the human race would cease to exist (as identified in the The Federal Government's "Australia's Biodiversity Strategy (2010–2030)". Therefore, we must maintain the recommended 4,000 and 7,600 GL necessary to prevent further environmental damage.

However, at the same time that the Authority is planning to take some water away from irrigators, it plans to double the water allocation for mining. This is a 'double whammy' on the environment and all Australians. Not only are we seeing Australia's natural resources being quarried and sold off to overseas corporate interests, with no long term benefit to its citizens, we are seeing our beautiful, unique, landscape trashed and polluted. The water used in many mining processes ends up in toxic waste dams, for which there is no easy disposal solution, and much of what remains is usually unfit for human use.

As stated previously, this submission is a plea for sanity to prevail. There is an estimated 2 million tonnes of salt washed from from the system every year, that needs to be flushed out to sea, yet in recent years the Murray River has not even reached the ocean.

This has had a devastating affect on lower river communities dependent on traditional farming, tourism, and fishing. It has seen large areas of River Red Gum and Black Box woodlands die, and there has been insufficient water in lakes and wetlands to allow waterbirds to nest and breed on a regular basis. Similarly, without enough water for fish to reach floodplain for breeding, native fish and fishing are at risk.

## **Planning a sustainable future**

No one should be disadvantaged by decisions made under the Murray Darling Basin Plan, and those communities that are directly affected by proposed water cuts must be fully compensated. The foolhardy actions of previous governments that were responsible for the criminal over-allocation of non-existent water, was no fault of theirs, and we believe alternate employment and business opportunities must be provided to affected communities. In this respect, we suggest solar thermal renewable energy would be an ideal alternative, one that would allow agricultural activities to continue below the arrays, while greatly assisting Australia's commitments in reducing carbon emissions to combat climate change. Locals should be given preference for employment opportunities this would generate, and also given the opportunity to invest in these projects.

In respect to climate change, while the modeling that has been done suggests that overall rainfall in the Murray Darling catchments is likely to decline in the future, we can never be certain until it happens. Therefore, we believe the precautionary principle must come into play by adopting a worst case scenario.

**In conclusion** we believe it is imperative that, just for once, instead of trying to achieve a so-called 'balance', where the environment always comes off second best, the scientific advice provided by experts must be adopted in full.

We thank the Minister for the opportunity to comment, and sincerely hope at least some of our suggestions are taken on board.

Yours sincerely  
John Edwards  
Honorary Secretary.