



Dr Anne Jensen
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Hon Malcolm Turnbull
Prime Minister of Australia
PO Box 6100
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

24 May 2017

Dear Prime Minister,

RE: FEDERAL LEADERSHIP REQUIRED TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN

Strong Federal leadership by the Commonwealth Government is needed to ensure that the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is implemented effectively and for the benefit of all Basin people. Statesmanship is needed on critical decision points for water recovery in June and December 2017, to broker a sustainable outcome among vested regional and state interests.

Are you aware that the Lower Darling ran dry for 8 months from December 2015 to August 2016? This was not due to drought but was caused by upstream over-allocation combined with operating practices designed to reduce evaporative losses from Menindee Lakes. When the communities of Broken Hill and the Lower Darling had only weeks of water supply remaining, extraction was still being allowed in the Upper Darling. When the Queensland floods sent large flows down the system, irrigators upstream of Menindee Lakes were allowed full allocation, before water was delivered to stressed downstream communities.

Water supply to Lower Darling communities and ecosystems has fallen off the agenda. Proposals for a pipeline will leave the Lower Darling ecosystem with little or no flow. The Lower Darling is included within the MDBA-managed southern basin because it is downstream of Menindee Lakes, but the river is dependent on the northern basin for inflows, and these are managed under separate New South Wales operating arrangements, without provision for flows to the Lower Darling.

Effective implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan requires appropriate supporting state regulations and operating processes. Shepherding water will be critical for effective implementation. The lack of secure flows to the Lower Darling is another instance of NSW refusing to tackle the issue of shepherding water to downstream users. I raised this issue with you in my letter of 28 August 2016 over NSW irrigators intercepting environmental flows for irrigation use; concerns which Minister Joyce dismissed in his reply of 11 October 2016.

The Basin Plan will require the full 3200 GL water recovery for river health, as you committed to last June. It will be critical to withstand arguments that environmental outcomes can somehow magically be achieved with less water, when there is already evidence that the 3200 GL cannot meet all the environmental targets in the Plan.

Establishing the Basin Plan will be part of your legacy, completing the task you started with John Howard in 2006. Your direct input will be necessary on critical decision points in June and December, to make sure that the Plan is implemented on time, with full water recovery. Australia needs an effective Basin Plan which delivers a fair water-sharing deal to all communities, and keeps Basin rivers flowing for their full length and eventually to the sea.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Anne Jensen
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Healthy Rivers Ambassador