

Bret Walker SC

Royal Commissioner

MDB Royal Commission

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Dear Commissioner

I write as an individual member of the public wishing to comment upon the Royal Commission called by the South Australian Government into the parlous state of our largest river basin within Australia. I congratulate the South Australians for having the gumption to initiate this Royal commission.

As a citizen of mature years I grew up reading books. Many of the stories and poems of my childhood included reference to the iconic inland rivers so beloved of Lawson, Patterson and many others.

In my working life as a teacher and then a Union Officer I travelled extensively throughout NSW, Queensland, and into Victoria and South Australia. Besides a fascination with our defunct rail systems in the bush, I grew to appreciate the life giving river veins which snaked across our bushland.

I am therefore very saddened to now see and hear about the loss of so much of our iconic river-lands and riparian edges and marshes associated with these river systems. In particular the effects upon the Coorong seem to be absolutely ruinous.

I remember speaking with two wonderful old Aboriginal teacher's aides at Walgett who recalled when the Barwon River was clear water (contrast that with now) and fish were able to be seen in the water. They recalled a number of exploits along the banks of the Barwon as children.

Our MDB has a large number of Ramsar wetlands which are slowly dying due to lack of water to fuel their life giving abundance.

I sincerely hope that your RC will be able to uncover the corruption and incompetence which seems to bedevil the MDB. As a citizen I and many others are just tired of the greed associated with the stealing of large quantities of water for personal or corporate financial gain to the detriment of many other water users and of course, the riverine environments.

I believe that the RC should scrutinise the several ABC TV programs aired showing apparent water theft on a large scale and others showing landscape changes which appear to advantage some wealthy landholders by changing natural water flows, while disadvantaging many others. Today Radio national aired the first of two "Background Briefing" programmes. I hope the RC has a close look at the transcripts as they appear to outline faults within the MDB Plan which need attention.

I will now elaborate on some of my thoughts about what I believe are changes to make the management of the MDB a more open and transparent entity.

1. Licensing all license requirements should be open to public scrutiny, and conditions attached to those licenses be quite transparent i.e. water volumes times of extraction etc.
2. Water use approvals. All approvals of licenses should include what earth works have been done and appropriate approvals for such works. Works without such approvals to jeopardise water supply to that property until either approved or dismantled. All "on farm" water storages to be approved by MDBA.
3. Meters. All water pumped is through meters. No meters no water!! With the advance of telecommunications all meters should be able to have real time monitoring accessed by MDBA. Meters to be checked

during pumping periods on a regular basis and also subject to random inspections.

4. Environment Water. To have priority over water for irrigation but on a par with water for town or stock water supplies. Outbreak of algal blooms in the river systems to be treated as a high priority.
5. Water Markets. The water market to be open, transparent, and regulated as an arm of the ASX or equivalent. Monopoly conditions monitored and transgressors subject to penalties. ASX to report to MDBA any suspicious water trading activity. Town water supplies, stock water or environmental water must be delivered and not sold.
6. Ramsar Sites. Ramsar wetlands to be given high priority in times of low water flow along the river systems. Reporting to the Ramsar Convention to be done on a regular basis by an independent monitor.
7. Basin Impediments. There are a number of activities that could have a deleterious effect on the basin water flow/and or quality. These include mining proposals, gas drilling, unauthorised earth works as well as land clearing. Any such proposals be subject to additional scrutiny by the MDBA.
8. Land clearing. What effects have the largescale clearing allowed by the former Coalition Government in Queensland and current NSW Government had on water flow, sediment loads and water retention by land vegetation? I believe these effects need to be quantified by the RC.
9. Corruption. There are suggestions that former government water ministers deliberately allowed corrupt water extraction. Is this corrupt behaviour a fact? There have also been suggestions the within the public service corrupt behaviour has advantaged irrigators over other water users or needs. Is this true?

I like to think and fervently hope that as Commissioner you will be able weed out and report on any corruption within the state water bureaucracies or indeed within the MDBA. As well I hope your final report will enable the MDBA to ensure that our rivers and wetlands are viable into the future.

Yours faithfully

Bernard Griffin