

Good morning to you all

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this crucial process.

I reside in Orange, NSW, and have recently retired as a secondary school Principal.

My formative and professional years have been spent living and working throughout the MDB. In sequence they are Broken Hill, Albury, Murwillumbah (an exception), Temora, Moree, Wialda, Young, Dubbo, Albury, Orange, Wellington, Bathurst, then Orange.

I have over 60 years of experiencing and observing the ongoing use of the MDB.

My concerns are not recent - I recall Uni holidays spent west of Moree in the 1970s burning huge piles of bulldozed river redgum and coolibah, preparing ex grazing and wheat country for cotton. Fu at the time, but in retrospect totally ruinous for a fragile ecosystem. I also recall touring cotton gins in the Wee Waa area around that time, unaware of the thirsty and chemical laden nature of the industry.

Lately, I see Orange City Council grab water from everywhere they can (Macquarie River pipeline, piping from Carcoar Dam in the Lachlan catchment) in the name of droughtproofing, when they actually onsell huge commercial quantities to local mining ventures such as Newcrest/Cadia. I also see Bathurst City Council marketing their city as having an abundant water supply, with no restrictions.

Both these Councils are at the headwaters of the MDB, and appear to have scant regard for communities downstream. Self interest abounds, and the MDBA appears deafeningly silent at this clear water grab.

So my first of 2 points is clear - local councils are systematically hoarding and onselling water in commercial quantities that should be a part of irrigation and environmental flows for the rest of the MDB.

My second point is well worn. Why has Local, State and Federal government allowed itself to be dazzled by the cotton and rice industries? We have heavily impacted rivers simply being sucked dry by two incredibly powerful, well connected, and brutal industries. It's simply not sustainable. Ironically I cannot blame those involved in these water hungry industries - they sustain several country towns and are working to become more efficient. Self interest is also mandatory when profit growth and efficiency are paramount.

Successive governments have systematically overallocated water to the point that I truly believe that communities see water as something that can simply be produced on and on. The notion of finite volumes whose allocation needs careful planning hasn't sunk in. Communities like Finley, Wee Waa, Deniliquin, Bourke, and Moree have grown and prospered for decades based on this false premise of unlimited water.

The tragic corollary here is that the environmental flows are not placed in pole position. The mindset is entrenched, and those who propose a reasonable solution are branded as greenies and held in contempt. This adversarial approach achieves nothing but further degradation of the MDB and ironically the death of the river systems that sustain the lifestyles of those living in the aforementioned towns.

Solutions? Clear, but not palatable.

1. Cities over 20,000 in the MDB are assisted in becoming genuine users of grey water recycling.

2. Cotton and reice continue to be grown, but as dryland crops dependent on natural rainfall cycles. Alternatives such as hemp, grazing and grains would be available in dryer periods.

3. Arid rangeland should remain as such. They are fragile, and the process of bringing irrigation water great distances to these areas to nurture thirsty crops like cotton and rice is really plain dumb. The water used has historically allowed other communities to wash, bathe, swim, and play. Just ask Broken Hill.

4. Reinstate the legislation and personnel that monitors and regulates the MDB. This includes EPA, MDBA, NPWS and local monitoring organisations.

5. Responsible irrigators do exist, and they deserve a fair share. The greed of others has tainted the role of sensible practitioners, and needs detection and hefty fines, even imprisonment.

Regards,

Keith Peasley

NSW