



Dear Uniting church members

Your Responses are Urgently needed to complement our submission regarding the Murray Darling Basin Guide.

The Murray Darling Basin Guide is a paper recommending how water could be reclaimed from irrigators and water users so it can make a sustainable level for the survival of the ecosystems within the basin.

Submissions were asked for from individuals or groups to comment about the socio economic impacts of the Guide discussion paper. The Lower House and the Senate have both asked for submissions each with slightly different but some similar terms of reference.

On the request from the Macquarie Darling and Riverina Presbyteries Ross Neville Julie Greig and Kel Hodge from the Board of Mission wrote responses on behalf of the UCA to both houses of parliament.

See the attached summaries 1 The Murray Darling basin Guide Summary
2 The UCA submission regarding the MDB Guide

In the very short time frame for a response available, we could only circulate or contact a few people to form a response. We would like to rectify that issue now.

In the Enquiry submission submitted we indicated we would try and ascertain a broader perspective and opinion about the basin guide.

We would therefore like YOUR opinions to be sent back to us so that we can compile a more comprehensive follow up response to the govt enquiry. The Government deadline is April.

We invite you to:

- a. **Gather small groups to have a discussion.**
- b. **Invite neighbours or non UCA persons who may be interested.**
- c. **Look at the questions and discussion paper guide attached to provide a group answer to suggested questions.**
- d. **Ask someone to record the number of people in the discussion and the group responses to the issues.**
- e. **Send the responses to the Rural Office**

PO Box 70

Orange 2800

Or email responses to bomrural@bigpond.net.au

e Responses need to be returned to the office by 4th March

The attached papers includes some theological perspectives that could be used.

We cannot process individual responses. We need group responses, even that will be difficult enough.

Because we are a diverse church which, with grace, understands accepts and respects a diversity of opinions and theological perspectives all opinions and perspectives should be received and reported on.

Ross Neville

Julie Greig

Kel Hodge

The Uniting Church in Australia NSW Synod Board of Mission



Summary of the Uniting Church in Australia submission regarding the Murray Darling Basin Plan Guide

Who is the Uniting Church?

- We are representative of approx 280 congregations across the MDB area.
- We represent peoples of all industries, cultures and economic perspectives.
- Our people are the backbone of most communities.
- We are a church who deals with injustice advocacy and diversity of opinions.
- We have been proactive in dealing with rural and community issues.

Matters raised:

- The christian perspective maintains that human society has an obligation to care for and maintain the environment as well as to love and care for each other.
- We disagree with the statement that the proposed impact will only be 1.1% of regional product or a basin reduction of 800 jobs. The submission gave an example of the impact of one farming family loss in a small community and the Authorities plan indicates 22% of the basin population is outside urban town areas. The generalised figures do not reflect the personal trauma and impact on each individual enterprise and small community.
- The plan indicates cotton producing regions of the state will suffer most with a 20-30% Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL). Our submission includes research that has highlighted this part of NSW as the most vulnerable and least able to diversify in any agricultural readjustment. Aboriginality of this region is high and they rely on cotton for casual work.
- The plan then identified that dairy, rice and horticultural areas of the state are also vulnerable and rice farming from this area will be significantly reduced with these same SDL's. Our submission indicated most rice farms are smaller and specific use, with considerable capital investment and with limited options except to sell. Rice and Horticulture are labour intensive industries and the casual labour used generates much needed income for the local towns. The reduction in produce will have a lot more significant impact than predicted.
- The Authority indicates the current generation has to accept the necessary adjustments. Our submission highlighted that according to their figures this basin is proportionately the oldest population with the lowest post school education levels and the lowest dependency rate of worker per elderly in Australia. This is taking advantage of the already disadvantaged.
- The drought impact in the basin also highlighted the numbers of people already leaving farming within the basin as above the normal of Australia.
- We emphasised how much the community work and activity UCA congregations contribute to their towns. We had documented this in our social impacts of the drought submission in 2009. The work done by the Rural Chaplains supports the Authorities claim for the need for support for the adaptive capacity of each community. Planning should include members of the community in all stages.
- Our submission then picked up some points in a Vic/Tas Synod report on water use in the MDB. There are alternative ways to consider saving water. For example, farming practices have for 50 years been improving water efficiency, farmers already have been prepared to sell part of their water allocation to fund efficiency programs, some farmers have already been including the environment in their farm plan, Govt. working with farmers has worked with Landcare. Water trading has already proven to be an unfair and unequal system with people forced by personal circumstances to sell.

The Uniting Church in Australia NSW Synod Board of Mission



The Murray Darling Basin Authorities Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan A summary

The plan for the Murray Darling Basin (MDB) is being implemented in three stages

1. The guide to the proposed plan which was released in Oct 2010
2. The draft plan, due to be released in 2011
3. The final plan, due to be released in 2012

The objects of the Water Act 2007, which established the Authority, is to:

1. Protect, restore and provide for the ecological values and ecosystems of services of the basin.
2. Promote the use and management of basin water resources in a way that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes.
3. Ensure the return to environmentally sustainable levels of extraction of water resources that are over allocated or overused.
4. Maximise net economic returns to the Australian community

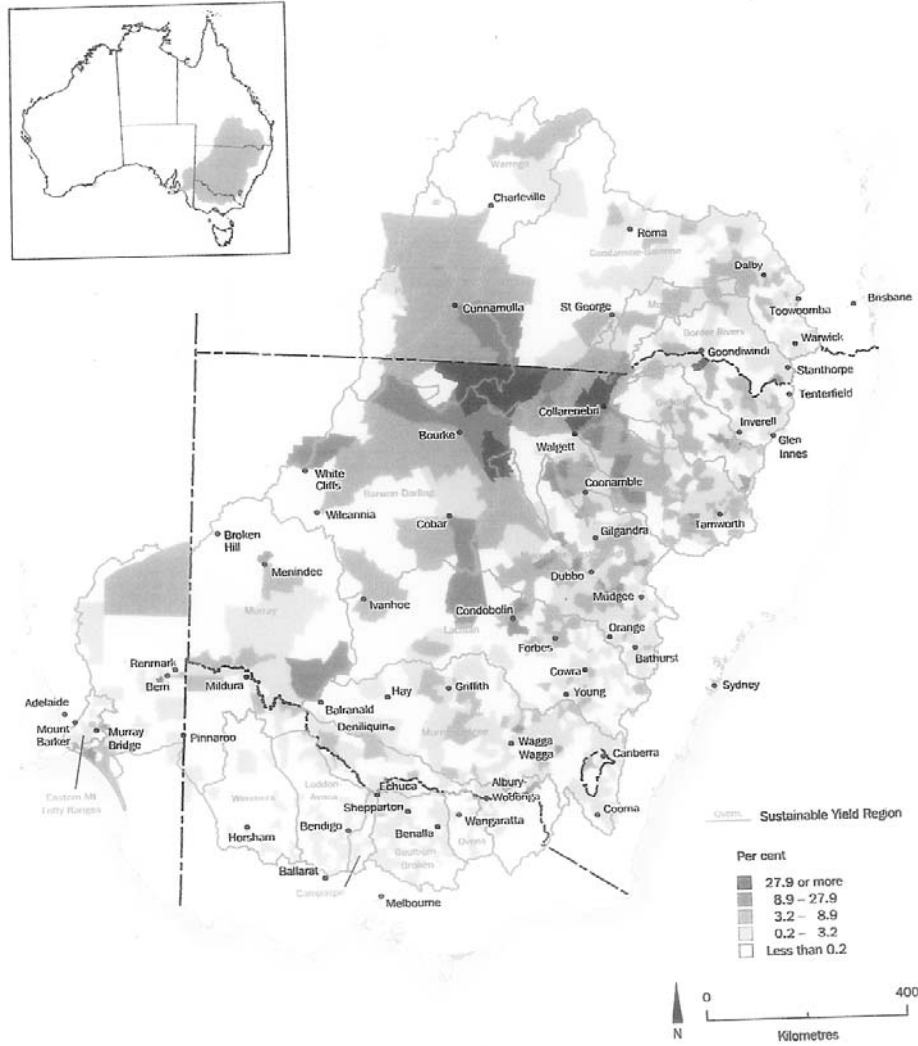
The authority in the guidelines presents its findings aiming to;

1. *Present a range for the amount of water needed for the environment.*
At this stage it has determined that between 3,000 and 7,000 Giga Liters (GL) is needed for the environment from surface water and between 99 and 227 GL from ground water. This water is to be purchased by the federal government and will be permanently removed from production.
2. *Consider the social and economic effects of reclaiming this amount of water for the environment on the different catchment areas of the basin*
Overdevelopment and over allocation has occurred in some catchments. A reduction in irrigated agricultural activity is needed with a minimal 3,000gl to be removed from agriculture. Regions with high reliance on irrigated activity, Murrumbidgee, Moonie , Goulburn –Broken, Condamine-Balonne and Murray, can be expected to experience the largest reduction in economic activity. The Border Rivers, Gwydir, Namoi, Macquarie-Castlereagh, Lachlan, Lodden, Murrumbidgee and parts of the Murray regions can expect to have substantial social impacts. There is sufficient diversity of economic activity and social capital in some regions not to be seriously affected.
3. *Consider a number of scenarios for establishing surface water and ground water long term sustainable diversion limits (SDLs) ie how much can be used for production, town water use etc.*
The Authority is proposing different levels of water buyback in different catchments. It includes both water pumped from the rivers and water from bores. The total across all catchments is a reduction of 37%

The main criticism of the Guide has been that it has failed to adequately take into account the social and economic impact of the water reductions and there is disagreement between the Authority and the Federal Government about the interpretation of the Water Act in this regard.

*A more comprehensive social and economic impact is urgently needed
Effective transitional arrangements will be essential p28 of the guide*

Murray-Darling Basin and Sustainable Yield Regions
 Indigenous population, 2006 Census Collection Districts



© Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001
 Based on ASGC Edition 2001
 Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2001
 Projection: Albers Equal-Area Conic GDA94 (cm 135°E, Std parallels 18°S, 36°S)

1 Based on your groups christian faith perspective what do you understand the relationships are between God, creation and food production?

Scriptures indicate that a creator God and Christ delights in what has been created and we should look and listen to creation to understand God better. Genesis 1:20-29, 2:15, Job 12:7-10 Colossians 1:14-23

The bible then indicates God put humankind in this world to take care of it Various interpretations of what these Genesis commands means have been used over history

Dr. David Waner, of Michigan suggests some guidelines people use today in the way we take care of the world:

- 'Creation care' means care that will allow creation to flourish and increase in its fruitfulness and diversity;
- To 'subdue the earth' means to bring it under control and make use of its resources to feed the world;
- 'To rule' means to manage so that everything thrives;
- 'To tend or care' as a Christians means to serve creation

Scriptures such as Psalm 8:1-9 would indicate that farming is a Godly profession with a community responsibility. Associated with the role to care for the environment is the role to provide food and clothing for the poor, the widow and the unemployed.

David Evans of Washington USAID indicates that there is a creative tension between producing food and maintaining the environment. Scott Sabin ('Floresta USA') and Dr. King David Armour (African Farmers Assoc.) both indicate how serious this problem is world wide. It is exasperated because farmers in many countries are not given choice, tenure or profitable returns on their products. The Increasingly urbanized societies of the world are demanding cheap, quality food with little regard to the problems this might create inhibiting sustainable food production or food justice between countries or farmers. Over the last 50 years food purchases as a percentage of average income has decreased from almost 50% to approx. 25%

2 What do you see the consequences of having an unhealthy relationship with creation in your area?

Scripture indicates that God expects proper dominion, ownership and stewardship of the land. If this doesn't happen there are possible apparent consequences for both the people and the land. Leviticus 25:2-7, Leviticus 26:31-35.

Not all farmers are farming totally for profit or productivity. Those that are could be seen to be potentially destroying their environment and changing land use capability because they are looking only at the short term. The story of Joseph in Egypt would indicate God expects people to plan for the future Genesis 41:1-49

Holistic farm practices taught in Australia today. Use farm goals to all farm decisions based upon:

- Quality of life wanted
- The forms of Production to be used
- The effect of any decision on Future resource bases (water, mineral, energy, community)

The smaller or family farm is understood to be the key to sustainability of world food supply and production. The world itself is placing a physical limit to most input resources able to be used in today's food production. Yet Canberra's average environmental footprint is 7ha/capita, Australia 6.5ha/capita while the world average is 0.8ha/capita (CIRO Transitions) Australian Farm businesses feed 600 people every year: 150 domestically 450 overseas (Australian Farm Institute June 2010)

Professor John Ikerd of Missouri suggests sustainable agriculture promotes smaller more diversified family farms more than agribusiness farms. 'The family farm focuses on people, diversification and ways to farm in harmony with nature. This is still a mandate that too few are yet willing to accept but it is a mandate that cannot be denied.'

Ikerd's assertion has been supported by the research in The United Nations 2008 International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge Science and Technology looking at future world food production. This report indicates that the multifunctionality of small farms worldwide makes them a key to overcoming world famine because they have sustainable farm practices.

3 How might we deal justly and equitably with the range of users within the basin?

(Long term old irrigators/new users, Upper/lower catchment, large/small water users, food/clothing/town users, limited option users (no alternative enterprise possible)

Scripture again warns us about human nature it tells us man's greed and selfishness can lead to environmental problems. See Jeremiah 9:12,13, Ecclesiastes 5:10,11 We know that whoever has land never has enough, and whoever has water also never seems to have enough.

Scripture warns us about muddying the waters downstream for the neighbour or is it for the next generation? See Ezekiel 34:18,19

The two parables Jesus used provide warnings about building home and businesses on sand or not counting all the possible consequences. Luke 6:46-49 and Luke 14:28-30

Does Jesus' teaching about workers in the vineyard help in making decisions about prioritizing who should get water cuts? (Matt 20:1-18)

All users have a role in reducing or being more efficient in water use. There are many integrated water use systems available for irrigators and cities that are only just being explored. (CSIRO Transitions in Sustainable Urban development)

4 Choose one or two issues that this study has raised and suggest actions that you, your church or your community can take to engage or raise awareness about the topic.

Persons quoted spoke and attended: International Conference Brackenhurst 'Environmental Programme' Kenya 2006 International Rural Church Assoc conferences Canada 'Cry of the Heart' 2007 International Rural Church Assoc conferences Germany 2010 'Hunger The Global Challenge' Book Pathways Toward Sustainable Urban Development in Australia 'Transitions' P Newton (Ed)2010