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REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE CAP RESPONSE SHEET FOR COMMENTS ON DRAFT REPORT

The March 2000 draft report on the **Review of the Operation of the Cap** by the Cap Project Board to the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council is now available for public comment. Comments on the draft report are due by **10 July 2000**.

If you wish, you may use this form to tell us what you think about the position of the Cap Project Board in their report on the Review of the Operation of the Cap. If there is insufficient space on the form, you may add additional sheets or write a separate submission.



The draft report, and further copies of this response sheet, are available from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and from the Commission's web site:

www.mdbc.gov.au

The draft report will be modified to reflect comments received and a final report on the Review of the Operation of the Cap will be presented to Ministerial Council Meeting 29 in August 2000.

Those who provide comments will receive a copy of the final Report once it has been approved by the Ministerial Council.

COMMENTS BY: *ORANGE REGION VIGNERONS ASSCN
DAPPLEDALE WATER USERS GROUP*

CONTACT DETAILS: *See covering letter*

DATE: *7 JULY 2000 (FAXED)*

The deadline for comment is **10 July 2000**.

Comments (by e-mail if possible – this response sheet is available electronically on the Commission's web site) should be directed to:

• Review of the Operation of the Cap Murray-Darling Basin Commission GPO Box 409 CANBERRA ACT 2601	Attn: Dr Tony McLeod, Project Manager Tel: 02 6279 0144 Fax: 02 6230 7579 Email: tony.mcleod@mdbc.gov.au
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• or your local member of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). Those comments made via the CAC that are received prior to **Friday 16 June 2000** will be considered at CAC Meeting 24 – 27 June 2000.

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ORVA

**ORANGE REGION
VIGNERONS
ASSOCIATION**

P.O. Box 1363, Orange, NSW, 2800

7 July 2000


● Review of the Operation of the Cap
Murray-Darling Basin Commission
GPO Box 409
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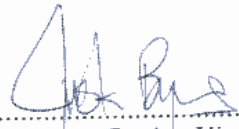
Attn: Dr Tony McLeod, Project Manager

Fax: 02 6230 7579

We submit our Joint Written Submission on the Review of the Operation of the Cap. Original will follow by Express Post.

We would welcome your response or responses.

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for Appledale Water Users Group


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for Orange Region Vignerons
Association

*Note Please note correction on P.5 -
not on faxed copy.*

A joint submission on the Murray-Darling Ministerial
Council Review of the Operation of the Cap
of the Orange Region Vignerons Association
& Appledale Water Users Group
July 2000

As water users whose watershed lands fall within the Murray Darling river catchment, we have a vital all-caring interest in the management of water resources. We respectfully differ with the optimistic report in the Project Board's Draft Review of the operation of the Cap.

As high country off-river landowners and agriculturalists we dispute the Board's claim that without the Cap there would have been a significantly increased risk that the environmental degradation of the river system of the Murray-Darling Basin would have been worse.

We take this opportunity to indicate we are pleased to be given a chance now to be involved in discussion and the review of the Cap. However, we believe our involvement as members of the public vitally concerned with the environmental management of the water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin, should have been sought and encouraged before any decision as drastic as imposing the Cap was taken.

No public debate, least of all community involvement took place prior to the Cap inception, which should have happened. We are not convinced that up to now the principles, theories and strategies relating to the Cap have been properly or fully thought through, least of all debated publicly or by the public.

That a decision (the Cap) involving the direct interests and welfare of between 2 and 3 million Basin people can and was taken by such a loose grouping of people represented by the MDBMC in disregard of those people's relevant involvement and opinions is alarming to say the very least.

Notwithstanding the following criticism dealing with the issue involving the increasing of river flows and volumes of water we are less than convinced that any purported overall increases in volume and/or flow levels in the Murray-Darling river system was as a result of the Cap. We think it more likely it was the result of a combination of higher than average annual rainfalls and the operation by governments of dams enabling larger releases of water from government storage dams.

We do know that in 1997 & '98 this was the case in the NSW Central Tablelands when Burrendong Dam was emptied to about 1% of capacity and notwithstanding the massive flooding of both the Western Plains and the Macquarie Marshes, the dam filled to 123% of capacity in just a few short weeks. By the end of the 1999 winter that dam was full to about 120% of capacity, after once again causing down stream flooding and at the end of June 2000 that dam was over 100% full notwithstanding for the last two months an average of 3,000 megalitres per day has been released from the dam and that over the hot dry summer months the daily amount was even greater.

The Board's above conclusion appears to rest upon the assumption that the Murray-Darling river system has experienced increased flows as a result of the Cap on water diversions and that increased flows of themselves translate into an improvement in the environmental sustainability of the river system, an assumption with which we respectfully disagree.

With respect, your conclusion may well be valid, that there are some river systems throughout the planet, where increased flow levels improves river health, but in our opinion that is not necessarily so for the Murray-Darling river system. We take the opposite position and say it is more likely to worsen river health.

In our opinion the underlying thesis of the Board's Draft Review is that the Cap was necessary because river water diversions were the main cause for the decline in river health and that the Cap has lessened and/or slowed the rate of water diversion, thereby providing the basis for increased flows of water necessary for restoring the ecological health and quality of the rivers and their waters.

We submit that thesis is wrong though possibly could have relevance in some extreme circumstances, such as where diversions were of such magnitude they caused a river to completely dry up. In our opinion the Board's thesis for the Murray-Darling system has practically no ecological foundation. The fact is that unlike most other river systems throughout the world, much of the Murray-Darling river system has natural annual flow levels which fluctuate between two extremes: flood to nil/negligible flows, often to the point off commencing to dry up.

In our humble opinion the natural ecology of the Murray-Darling river system evolved in an environment where weather and climatic conditions produced high/flood river flow levels in the wet winter-spring months, down to nil/negligible river flow levels in the hot dry summer months. Proof of this thesis can be found from the recordings and reports of early white explorers, from indigenous fables and early white settlers.

For example, it is fact of history that Murray-Darling river steamers were often left stranded high and dry up river as river flow levels declined making those rivers seasonally unnavigable. Indeed, none other than Charles Darwin in January 1823, critically noted this Australian river feature and complained when he reached the Macquarie River at Bathurst (NSW), that it was most "unimpressive", having "stopped running" and was "little more than a series of puddles."

It is true that the Murray-Darling system of rivers, like all rivers, needs renewable water to remain healthy, but that is only a generality and should not be extended to an absolute rule of the more water the better the river health, at least not for the Murray-Darling river system.

We respectfully disagree with the Board that the "decline in river health" was caused by the "diversion of water from the Basin's river system", at least not directly the cause. There are many causes, some known, some as yet unknown, for the declining river health, but we submit a major cause does not include diversions of water.

We submit one of the major causes of poor river health is ironically that of too much water unseasonably being released by government departments, i.e. in the hot dry summer months, from their large storage river supply dams. If the Board consider us to be wrong in our thesis we would welcome any copies of your own research materials to the contrary, to study, analyse and assess.

A second cause of poor river health which is unavoidably integrated with the first mentioned cause is that of the government system of operations and its water storage dam design, releasing unseasonably huge volumes of very cold, oxygen deficient sometimes saline water from poorly designed bottom release dams into the fragile river system.

We submit that the major cause behind the above type of water being released from bottom release dams is that of the great depth and excessive turbidity of the dammed-up water which in turn permits hydrological thermal stratification of the dams water to take place in the hot dry months.

Further it has been known by American hydrologists for 50 years or more that thermal stratification in deep storage dam waters produces in the deeper layers of oxygen deficient water conditions, a natural phenomenon in which minerals activate to create salt irons in the water.

The above two causes (unseasonal flow levels and poor quality water) synogistically combine, resulting in stress on the rivers natural ecology. The lifting of flow levels in the Macquarie River to unnatural levels by releasing 4,000 to 6,000 megalitres of water per day during January and February which now happens, may assist in ensuring that more water flows all the way down to the mouth of the Murray River notwithstanding water ^{directions} ~~divisions~~ for flood irrigation purposes, but it does not ensure the reproduction of that river system's natural ecology, but rather its extinction.

On this score we note that Richard Kingsford, a government research scientist employed by the NSW Government, has publicly stated that stretches of the Macquarie River are already effectively "ecologically dead", with only the European carp surviving, yet the river does not suffer any shortage of water flow.

That river's natural ecology cannot survive the year in year out unseasonal constant 'drowning' through the operation of Burrendong Dam. If other dams on other tributaries are being operated, which we are led to believe they are, in the same way, then the adverse environmental effects will be significant.

Both vertebrae and non-vertebrae river species have declined in the Macquarie river to the point of extinction because of too much and the wrong kind of water. The truth is the government operated storage dams are drowning the ecology of the rivers with water.

We think it is significant that not only does the environmentally destructive feral specie (the European carp) survive, but also thrives in the Murray-Darling river system. It no doubt feels perfectly at home in a river converted to its style of constantly flowing European rivers. In our respectful opinion the Europeanisation of the Murray-Darling river system is at the root of the unhealthy state of that river system, hence more of the same treatment is to us unacceptable.

We know there are other causes of river ill-health, like excess salinity, but we respectfully submit, this and many other causes are interconnected with or have their genesis in the way the river system is being operated through storage dam water released by respective state governments.

It is submitted that the Board's thesis fails to recognise that simply adding more water into the Murray-Darling rivers system for purposes of securing "irrigation water supplies", is incompatible with the river's ecology and therefore environmental health. Likewise there is an irreconcilable conflict between the needs of the river's ecology and the needs of downstream irrigators in that the latter need major river flows so as to flood their lands at exactly the time (season) when the river ecology needs nil or negligible flows.

With respect to the Board itself, it also suffers from an incompatible desire on the one hand to provide "security of supply for existing irrigators" and on the other wishing to arrest the "declining health of the rivers". As pointed out above the two things simply do not go together.

Treating the Murray-Darling tributaries as water supply channels to lift the river flows and levels of the Murray River itself is inimical to it and certainly is to all that river's tributaries, like the Macquarie River. It must stop now.

We submit underpinning the MDBMC decision to introduce the Cap in 1995, was a perception that South Australia, for its own security and development, required more water to flow to and through that State, down the Murray River, if at all possible. There is no doubt this can be done, but only at an unacceptably high or heavy environmental cost for the rest of the Murray-Darling Basin and in particular its river system.

To ensure South Australia receives a greater share of the Murray-Darling river system, may have the appearance of equity until the proposition is subjected to a more rigorous examination. When that occurs the proposition is unsustainable in more ways than one as what looks like equity for South Australia is anything but that, being inequitous for up-river water providers and positively harmful to both the river and land environment.

We suggest that given that land clearing for agricultural purposes since white settlement has resulted in anything up to twice as much water now entering the Murray-Darling river system, there is little or no evidence to show that less water flows down the Murray River into South Australia than it did 100 years ago.

Because there exists in South Australia little or no part of the watershed of the Murray River, South Australia has contributed practically nothing towards the added volumes of water entering that river. South Australia is purely a river water user, not a river resources provider. Thus it has no automatic entitlement to more of the Murray-Darling Basin's water resources.

We perceive that one of the reasons behind the Cap was to enable the capturing of more water in the Murray-Darling river system's storage dams which would permit the regular flushing of the Murray River to clear salt affected waters from that river. We say notwithstanding the flushing may temporarily clear away saline water, it provides no long term remedy for river salinity and is wasteful of huge amounts of water resources.

We are led to believe that at present South Australia contributes in excess of 30% of the salt in the Murray River and will by about 2015 contribute 50% or more. We submit most of this salt is ground salt caused by excess irrigation (much of it flood irrigation) causing water tables to rise and land salts to surface, which is then washed into the Murray River. This being the position then there is absolutely no case for South Australia to have access to greater volumes by way of increased water flows down the Murray River but rather less water, at the very least until South Australians change their land and river degradation irrigation practices.

We say that South Australia has not earned a greater share of the Murray River's water and that there is no equity for other water users when they are deprived of water just to enable the flushing of the river to remove salts caused by bad irrigation practices of others. It should be realised there is no equity to be found or had in sharing wrongdoing.

We submit no state should have the right to destroy even one of its own rivers, least of all then the right to destroy what is the major river system of Australia (covering 14% of its land mass) which will surely happen if the MDBMC persists in mis-using the Cap to increase the amount of water for securing flood irrigation supply; for flushing and increased flow down the Murray River into South Australia.

We submit the Board as a public body has an obligation and duty to disclose to the public any such perceived threat to the Murray-Darling river system.

The stated purpose of the Cap is that of securing downstream "irrigation water supplies". Therefore there can be no justification for a Cap which causes discrimination towards rural and regional Australia. Rural and regional Australia, unlike the coastal metropolises of Melbourne, Sydney and Newcastle etc., will be discriminated against by having their water allocation frozen at the 1994 level and thus forced to go cap (pardon the pun) in hand to a private water trader to obtain further water for their own growth. We submit political leaders have lost any sense of social priorities when they give their support to a Cap which has these results.

Ecologically viewed, South Australia has no alternative but to solve any perceived present or future water resource shortfall by other means than those which seems to have been adopted by the MDBMC. After all, the Murray-Darling Basin river system is not the limit of the nation or the states' renewable water resources. Annually Australia has a run-off of rainwater of about 450 million megalitres or about 22.5 megalitres for every man, woman and child. We are in fact in fertile Australia, water 'wealthy' as compared to any other country.

We know and submit that the operation of the Cap is currently causing environmental, economic and social damage and loss and we have no hesitation in calling on the MDBMC to recommend that the mis-used Cap, certainly as it operates on watershed landowners, be lifted and ended. We say that there are other possible solutions or ways of reversing the declining river health of the Murray-Darling river system other than to simply 'drown' its ecology.