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clarence
VALLEY COUNCIL
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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Reference:
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Chair
Tony Windsor MP
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Regional Australia
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CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Dear Mr Windsor

Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia

Inquiry into the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan

At the November meeting of Clarence Valley Council, Council unanimously passed the following resolution:-

1. The Council again register its strong opposition to any plans to divert waters out of the Clarence catchment.
2. Council make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia inquiry into the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan (MDBP), noting Council's opposition to any plans to divert waters out of the Clarence catchment.

The Council's strong position against the diversion which also reflects the position of our community and is supported by coastal Councils as one is based on the following facts which are assessed using Councils sustainability framework.

Environmental

- The Clarence is one of the nation's great wild rivers, and one of the few rivers in Australia which has no major dam. The only across-river structure for water diversion is the relatively minor Nymboida Weir.
- The river is also the only place in the world where the endangered Eastern freshwater cod now exists. Much of the river is also surrounded by national parks and many of the tributaries and proposed dams from the 1970's studies are within World Heritage declared rainforest.
- Multi million dollar studies for the off-river storage urban water supply dam at Shannon Creek which supplies water to the Clarence and Coffs harbour communities proved that any large dam on the Clarence River, if it diverted the highest or the lowest flows, could have dire environmental impacts on aquatic lifecycles and our fishing industry. This is why the Shannon Creek dam (only 30,000 ML) was designed to only take a small amount of medium river flows

from the Nymboida, and was not located on the river. The science is beyond doubt, all those rivers which have large cross-river dams have had major environmental impacts on aquatic eco-systems, wetlands and fish habitats.

- This is the very reason that the Federal Government has released the Murray Darling Basin plan and is trying to stop the river dying from too much regulation by dams and irrigation use. Note: relatively small urban water supplies across-river dam on the Mary River in Queensland and recently the proposed Tillegra dam in the Hunter Valley were rejected by Federal and State Governments and did not go ahead due to the environmental impact of the dams. These rivers only have a fraction of the environmental values of the Clarence.

Economic

- The effects of major dams would inevitably decimate the Clarence River commercial and recreational fishing industry and associated maritime support industries, valued at over \$800 million. It is well proven that variable flows and the flood flows are essential for a viable fishing and prawn industry. The Clarence commercial fishing industry is the biggest river fishing industry in Australia and is worth over \$92 million and generates over 430 direct jobs. The recreation fishing industry forms a large part of the \$280 million tourism industry in the Valley which generates much of the economic base of Yamba, Iluka and Maclean.
- The engineering reports on the possible diversion of the Clarence River, carried out in the 1960's and 70's, proved even then that any diversion scheme could not possibly be economically justified without a huge Government subsidy. Even then, the cheapest option was going to cost over \$500 ML, which in today's terms would be many thousands of dollars per ML. Note: irrigators now complain about paying less than \$10 ML in the Murray Darling Basin for their irrigation water. The reports done did not analyse the economic or environmental costs to the Clarence River and on the community.
- Any diversion of water to the West is not going to give any more irrigation water except for those irrigators in the upper catchments eg Namoi, Gywdir, as system losses mainly by evaporation would not see any Clarence water reaching the Murray system. As well, any new water in the system would further accentuate the unbalanced hydrology in the MDBC which is leading to a major irrigation salinity problem in the Murrumbidgee and Murray irrigation areas.

Socially

- The Healthy River Commission, in its report of the Clarence in early 2000's, found that the one thing that absolutely unites the whole Valley is its river and everybody agrees that this river has great significance and should not be diverted to the West.
- The four Aboriginal nations which cover the Clarence River all have a great mythological link to the river with every nation having a dream time story about the Clarence River's creation and there are numerous sacred sites in the area where the dams in the 1970's studies were proposed.

Governance

- The net result of any scheme to divert the Clarence would be that instead of having one river system which is on its knees environmentally, socially and economically, you would instead have two systems in a similar state.
- Financially, without huge Government subsidisation, any diversion scheme is totally uneconomic and cannot be paid for by water users in the west without a 100 times increase in water prices.

As assessed against the four sustainability pillars above any diversion of the Clarence is not sustainable on any factor.

Yours faithfully

Richie Williamson
Mayor