

..... saving the **Murray Darling**

The problems of the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB) are representative of what is happening in many of the nation's river systems, although writ large. We have treated the MDB as an expendable commodity.

Draining water from four states and one territory, it covers one-seventh of the continent. Two million people live in its catchment and another 1.4 million living outside of it are directly dependent on it, particularly in South Australia.

94% of the rain that flows into the MDB evaporates and the annual river flow is equal to less than a day's flow of the Amazon. Yet despite these hard facts, the MDB accounts for 70% of Australia's irrigation and 40% of our food production.

Each state has made its own independent decisions about the use of the water in the 23 rivers involved, including entitlements for irrigation. Thirty years ago graziers in the south of Queensland switched to irrigated crops, and have become dependent on this river system. Since early this year, water has been piped to Melbourne, a city which has never had dependence on this river system. State governments will make decisions about the use of MDB water that increase their chances of re-election.

The consequence is the severe over-allocation of the entire system, wetlands are drying out and soil acidification is occurring as the water recedes while iconic river red gums are stressed and dying.

Thirty-eight plants put sewage back into the river, along with

4000 tonnes of animal waste from feedlots and piggeries, plus the run-off from pesticides and fertilisers.

2.5 tonnes of salt flow across the border into South Australia every minute. The lower half of the Ramsar-listed Coorong is six-times saltier than seawater. Due to minimal flows the mouth of the Murray has silted over: the only way it has been able to be kept open is by constant dredging since 2002. This is a river system that has been and continues to be thrashed.

Our Plan

- Guarantee the true independence of the **Murray-Darling Basin Authority**, with no vetoes from either the states or federal governments
- All decisions about future use of the MDB to take account of CSIRO **climate change** prediction of a further 9-14% reduction in water availability.
- Reduce the cap on **diversions** from the river and prevent any new diversions from occurring
- Ensure the **environment** has a fair entitlement to MDB water so that it can regain its capacity to sustain
- Ensure enough flow keep the **Murray mouth** open to the sea – naturally, without dredging
- From the perspective of environmental flows, include the lower **Coorong** as part of the Murray-Darling Basin
- Develop and implement structural adjustment schemes to assist **irrigator efficiency** and assist irrigators wishing to do so to exit from the industry with dignity
- Stabilise Australia's **population** so that the demands on the river will be less intense.