

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing this letter because I feel an obligation to inform you to the real cost of the Murray Darling Basin water buyback initiative. I am writing this as a farmer, a teacher and member of a rural community.

As a teacher in a small rural community I look back and remember my teaching placement at a small school with enrolments of 102. That same school in which I currently work part time has consistently declined to its current number of 49. No work in the area due to reduced water allocation has seen families leave in droves with none to return. Within the farms directly bordering ours there are at least 4 houses laying empty, as farmers can longer afford their employees. We currently employ 3 local men and women from the area but with our current water allocation of 4% we will be laying off workers in the not too distant future. It is not just farming businesses which feel the brunt either, shop keepers in nearby towns feel the down turn in business and it's just a flow on affect. No one dines out, goes to the movies, buys new clothes etc. when their income is declining on a regular basis. The Murray Darling Basin Plan has instilled such uncertainty into the community that it is difficult to make any long term plans.

This has a direct effect on our local sporting clubs. Trying to find a minimum of 18 boys and 7 girls of a similar age for football and netball teams respectively is near impossible. As of next year my daughter's age group will no longer be able to field a team, so we will have to travel to a larger town approximately 50km to 60km away if she wishes to pursue her sport. While the club debates its future with ever decreasing numbers. The families that have left, and are leaving, are our clubs umpires, coaches, canteen helpers, players, supporters and all round role models for our next generation. For the families that cannot afford to travel to another town their children miss out.

Finally my husband and I run a family farm. The stress that has been placed on us and other farmers with the water buyback is indescribable. I was born and raised in Melbourne and it was not until I moved to a rural community did I truly understand the important and undervalued role they play. We have some of the most water efficient farms in the world, producing clean, healthy food, free from chemical contaminants. We abide by strict guidelines with the use of our water and herbicides and pesticides. Which many other countries around the world do not. Farmers are the first to care about our environment, we live amongst it. We see it every day and no one disagrees that it should be cared for. But purchasing water for environmental flows off farmers for it to sit in storage unused from one season to the next is immoral. We are currently sitting on 4% allocation so have made the tough decision that we will not plant any rice over the summer but the water purchased by the government which they have not used cannot be bought and utilized by us.

Farming families are feeling the pressure, relationships are suffering and farmers who are the best in their field are weighing up whether it is worth the stress and uncertainty to continue. Rural communities are feeling the brunt of the Murray Darling Basin Plan and it appears too many that the government's main priorities are to those in larger metropolitan cities.

It is a complex issue and this senate inquiry will hopefully hear from those who understand it better than any, those in these rural communities who are trying to live through it.

Water bought by the government and not used must be made available to farmers so that they can grow healthy, clean food for this wonderful country and others that need it. Water buy backs must cease if the water they have already bought is not being used, what purpose is served by buying more. Finally, the environment is important I have no doubt but so are the adults and children who live in rural communities who are missing out, on necessities that city people take for granted. Why is my child and the children of my friends any less deserving of their parents having a job, the ability to afford dentist and doctors, access to good schools and sporting facilities. There is a very real human cost to the Murray Darling Basin Plan and those in rural communities are witnessing it first hand.

Nicole Fitzpatrick