

# SHOOTERS FISHERS and FARMERS



## SFF strategy on Murray Darling Basin water management

The Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBP) has failed farmers, the environment and regional communities. The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers (SFF) believe by properly measuring all water use, eliminating corruption and shifting decision making to local communities; we can both restore river health and enhance the vital role irrigation plays in our economy. Here are the ten measures we propose:

- 1] Full standardised metering and inspections across the MDB** – SFF fully supports a ‘no meter, no pump’ rule for water extraction. The federal government should supply all irrigators with an Australian Standard 4747 meter, to ensure consistency; and bring an end to self-regulation. Water meters, like electricity meters, should be owned by government and regularly checked by a government inspector. Satellite technology should be used to measure water use not easily metered (eg. floodplain harvesting).
- 2] Audit, measure and evaluate environmental water** – Too much Government environmental water is not accounted for, or substituted, and this reporting is often poor. Furthermore, environmental flows along the Murray River often hit choke points, flooding river banks and creating environmental damage. Management of environmental water must be centralised in the one entity, and the water kept for environmental purposes only (not sold or swapped). The costs and benefits of environmental flows must be analysed and reported on.
- 3] Local decision-making** – we must shift power away from bureaucrats making bad decisions in Sydney and Canberra, and give it back to people who live on the river. Each valley should have a local policy board; represented by irrigators, river ecologists, recreational water users and Indigenous communities. These boards won’t just advise or provide input to government, they’ll make decisions on how best to manage their water reservoirs. Government must train people in the decision-making processes and pay them for their time. A streamlined federal body can then map out an overall plan for the river based on the decisions made by the local bodies.
- 4] Federal royal commission and five-year pause in MDBP** – it’s unfair to continue pursuing water recovery targets until the above three issues are addressed. A federal royal commission can evaluate the flawed science, weak regulation and selective data undermining the MDBP; and flush out the corruption.
- 5] Review water transfer policies** – Under current rules, water is being moved around, changing characteristics and consequently jamming up the storage and regulatory systems, leaving some valleys with no water. We must investigate the impact of water trading, particularly the impact of water traded across valleys. If necessary, water traded between valleys should be stopped.
- 6] Floodplain harvesting regulation** – The NSW government should halt future floodplain harvesting plans and conduct robust scientific assessments of impacts, and clear definitions of the different types of flood plain harvesting. Once this is done, the government must use satellite technology to measure and properly regulate the different forms of floodplain harvesting.
- 7] Menindee Lakes restoration** – The Menindee Lakes should be restored and upgraded so that they can continue to be used to protect the Lower Darling.
- 8] Invest \$5 billion in vulnerable communities** – While much of the funds set aside for MDBP have been wasted, the remaining \$5 billion must be invested in communities hardest hit by drought, to improve their resilience to water variability.
- 9] Irrigator water right protection** – It’s unfair irrigators are slugged with full water charges while allocations are limited. Irrigators should be charged on a pro-rata basis for water used only. Irrigator water licences and property rights should be protected, and never subject to compulsory acquisition.
- 10] Stock and domestic water prioritised** – In order to ensure water is used where its most needed during dry periods, there should be clear trigger points in legislation signifying that when water flows hit a certain low level, extraction is restricted to domestic water and livestock consumption.