



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Opinion piece

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Murray Darling crisis – Just add water

If statements recently made by Government leaders, Ross Garnaut and other scientists are credible, it may be time for Australia to divert water into the Murray Darling River system.

Comments in Parliament by Water Minister Penny Wong and Environment Minister Peter Garrett as well as the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd all suggest that a major part of the crisis in the Murray Darling is attributable to climate change.

Prof Ross Garnaut's recommendations in relation to a 5% or 10% emission reduction target by 2020 conclude that those reductions will not alleviate the crisis in the Murray Darling system.

The Garnaut recommendations if accepted by the Government would mean that climate change would still have a massive impact on the system with those living within the system having to bear the burden even though they haven't caused the climate change problem.

In the past when so called "inland diversions" or intercatchment transfers have been discussed, they have been dismissed on the basis of being "unnatural" and having potential to add to salinity and water table issues.

If the prevailing scientific thought is true, there is real logic in repairing the human caused "unnatural" or climate change component of the crisis by adding water to the system.

This is not suggesting that the over-allocation issues should not be addressed but that the climate change caused reduction in inflows into the system should be handled in a different way than an additional clawback of water allocations which don't necessarily put water back into the system.

I will be suggesting to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Infrastructure, Anthony Albanese that Infrastructure Australia look at possible options of bringing additional water into the Murray Darling system.

This could be done as an interim rescue package whilst the rest of the world gets its house in order in terms of emissions reductions in a similar way in which desalination plants are being established to compensate for a climate change rainfall effect on the coast.

For those who suggest such a proposal would be tampering with nature, let them look at what human activity has caused in terms of polar meltdown and what will occur to the Murray Darling system if we do nothing.

The Prime Minister should know how many gigitalres of water are not flowing into the Murray Darling due to climate change otherwise the logic of the crisis argument is basically flawed.

If so, the Government should investigate the costs and benefits of water transfers. If it doesn't, billions of dollars could be spent on "Toorale Station" style buybacks without any real benefit to the environment within the Murray Darling River system.

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