

# Kooma Green School Statement

## Murray Darling Basin Water and Environment Action

### July 2007

We aim to restore the health of the Murray Darling Basin so that the Darling again flows to the Murray and the Murray to the sea.

To achieve we need to:

- (a) acknowledge the unique status of the Indigenous Nations in the Basin and their traditional connections to lands, waters and natural resources, under their own laws, customs and practices;
- (b) unify the governance of all water resources, in-stream, groundwater and artesian, in a context of integrated catchment management;
- (c) restore water volumes and flow patterns adequate to sustain rivers, wetlands and floodplains as healthy functioning ecosystems, especially in the light of climate change;
- (d) develop the ecological services economy of the Basin;
- (e) develop active sustainable communities.

The Commonwealth government's \$10 billion *National Plan for Water Security* aims to improve water efficiency and address over-allocation of water in rural Australia. For the first time, this gives one body -- the Commonwealth -- the clear responsibility for water management in the entire Murray Darling Basin.<sup>1</sup>

This *Statement* is a collection of ideas and initiatives from discussions at the Kooma Green School.<sup>2</sup> These can be drawn upon in developing more comprehensive plans to restore the Murray Darling Basin.

## Actions

- 1 Establish proper processes for engagement and consultation with Traditional Owner groups in planning for the Murray Darling Basin.

### Restore water

- 2 Buy back water for the environment and for Indigenous cultural values. The buy-back should begin immediately with \$280 million for the Macquarie Marshes.

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<sup>1</sup> The Commonwealth also has direct legislative responsibility for threatened species and internationally significant Ramsar wetlands through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*. As well it is a substantial funder of land and water management through the Natural Heritage Trust and other programs, in addition to the proposed \$10 billion over 10 years.

<sup>2</sup> The Kooma Green School was held from 25-27 May 2007 at Murra Murra on the banks of Nebine Creek, the traditional lands of the Kooma people. It was organised by the Green Institute and the Kooma Traditional Owners Association.

- 3 Require improved water system efficiency and where water is saved through public investment return 100% of the savings to the environment.
- 4 Return 20% of water traded to the environment (as is currently required in Victoria).
- 5 Investigate whether floodplain graziers might contribute to the cost of floodwater, recognising its beneficial usage, with all funds used for environmental water buy-back.
- 6 Require plantations established primarily for commercial wood production to pay for the water they consume.

## Prevent further degradation

- 7 Place a moratorium on new allocations of surface or ground water until up to date ecologically sustainable flow limits are robustly and scientifically determined, taking into account climate change and the precautionary principle. The moratorium should also apply to the construction or expansion of major infrastructure such as dams (including farm dams) and new pipelines such as that proposed to supply Melbourne.
- 8 Cap the amount of water that can be traded out of a district.
- 9 Recognise that irrigation will have to cease in some areas, and develop structural adjustment packages for the transition.
- 10 Abandon the weir proposed for Wellington on the lower Murray River.
- 11 Halt large-scale land clearing throughout the Basin.
- 12 Permanently protect the red gum icon forests of the Murray valley, with joint management where appropriate. Place a moratorium on commercial logging of floodplain forests throughout the Basin until flows are adequate to ensure regeneration and a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system is established.
- 13 Protect Cooper Creek,<sup>3</sup> the Paroo, and Nebine Creek from irrigation development.
- 14 Suspend completion of the Condamine Balonne Resource Operations Plan, which covers Cubbie Station and a number of similar huge on-farm dams, until the impacts on downstream wetlands, including the Ramsar-listed Narran Lakes, and the Darling River are assessed.

## Stop water profiteering

- 15 Cap the amount of water which can be owned by a single entity, within each catchment and Basin-wide.

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<sup>3</sup> The Cooper system is not strictly part of the MDB but shares similar issues and threats.

16 Place a moratorium on the conversion of non-compensible water authorisations to compensible forms of water allocation until sustainable flow limits are determined.

17 Prevent water stealing such as through unregulated diversions and the interception of environmental flows.

## Enable basin-wide governance

18 Legislate such that the primary responsibility of the proposed Murray Darling Basin Authority is to specify, and over time achieve, ecologically sustainable flows in all Basin water systems, taking into account climate change and the precautionary principle. Members of the authority should have specified expertise, including ecological, and should include Indigenous representation. Water trading should be managed by a separate agency.

19 Establish a well-funded independent Murray Darling Basin Information Bureau, responsible for research, collection and publication of Basin-wide environmental, scientific, social and economic information. Require the Bureau to undertake audits and table regular 'state of the Basin' reports in all Basin parliaments.

20 Support self-determined arrangements for Indigenous governance in the Basin, including by providing funding and other resources.

21 Develop Basin-wide structures for community engagement and consultation.

## Develop ecological services and social sustainability

22 Recognise the vital role of the Basin in providing ecological services, including clean water, biodiversity, carbon storage and renewable energy, and develop economic strengths based on these.

23 Over time, remove inappropriate activities, rehabilitate degraded land and implement sustainable practices for growing food and fibre in the Basin.

24 Ensure that all those who live in the Basin have good access to essential services, provided as locally as possible, and the opportunity to be part of a cohesive, enriching society.

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