Water Sharing Plan for the Murrah-Wallaga Area Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources

Submission: From Erica and Nic Dibden, Dairy Farmers and Commercial Irrigation Licence holders

1. **To what extent do you feel the plan has contributed to social outcomes?**

The impact of the current water sharing plan on social outcomes has been negative. The main driver of an agricultural business is access to constant, reliable water. Water provides stability to agricultural businesses, is the key to reinvesting and growing our agricultural concerns, and dictates whether we put on more staff, hold the current number, or to reduce employee numbers. Farms in Australia require multiple inputs and service providers to operate, these flow on businesses also rely on a robust agricultural industry.

We have been farming for approximately 20 years in Tilba, we have seen a great reduction in rain fall during this time, and we are learning to operate our farms under varying conditions. Our business includes a milk bottling plant, we employ 18 people on our farm and at the cheese factory.

The dairy sector has suffered a significant negative impact. For the Murrah- Wallaga Water Sharing Plan (WSP) specifically in 2010 there were 21 active dairy farm businesses producing 24.5 million litres of milk. In 2019 there were only 12 enterprises producing 22 million litres. A 42% decline in the number of farms and an 10% reduction in milk produced. An active dairy farm in the district employs 2 – 8 people throughout the year. The decreasing number of farms has a significant impact on employment within the local community. This is a low socio-economic region and every job matters.

The lengthening drought has seen irrigation cease and many farmers struggle with lack of quality stock and domestic water. To be a drought proof sustainable business, a farm needs to be able to invest in significant runoff catchment dams to capture the high flow water events, that water is then available for use in the drought periods. The process required to construct suitable on farm water storages is complicated, unclear, expensive, and difficult. When it is too hard, people simply will not do it.

2. **To what extent do you feel the plan has contributed to environmental outcomes?**

I believe that the implementation of additional water storage in the form of dam storage would further benefit the environmental outcomes of the plan. The sporadic nature of precipitation in our particular area, where the period of time between rain events appears to be more erratic

and of longer duration, has resulted in the reduction of native vegetation and water availability for local fauna. Larger water storage captured from these events would provide harbor and a food supply for fauna, additionally the water seepage from the storage dams would provide a life line for native vegetation. In short, I don't feel the plan has adequately provided for strong environmental outcomes taking into account prolonged dry spells.

3. To what extent do you feel the plan has contributed to economic outcomes?

Economically disastrous, if industry cannot operate or suffers a decline in production due to lack of water, the result is loss of jobs. As simple as this. No water. No agriculture. No jobs. This has a far reaching effect, as the jobs are not solely concentrated on farm, there are multiple subsidiary industries that rely on agricultural operations for the economic survival. This is none more apparent than on the South Coast of NSW.

4. To what extent do you feel the plan has contributed to meeting its objectives?

I don't believe the plan provides opportunities for market based trading of licences and water allocations as there are trading restrictions and there are not enough buyers or sellers. Only trading has occurred is when the land is sold. All commercial irrigators would like to purchase more licence, there are no sellers. Additionally I don't believe the plan provides flexibility for licensed water users in how they can use their water. To get assistance on how to apply for storage is very rigid and unclear.