

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Thursday, 1 March 2018

Dear Prime Minister,

TOLARNO STATION

via Wentworth NSW 2648
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RE: Murray Darling Basin Royal Commission

We are pastoralists on the Lower Darling River who lived with a dry river bed for 9 months in 2015-16. The river will stop flowing again by the end of 2018, with no idea of when there will be water in the river for my 20,000 sheep to drink, or family and staff to wash in. We currently have blue-green algae, putting our health and livelihood at risk. Our community has been decimated by the impact of this man-made disaster.

Over 7 months ago the ABC program Four Corners aired serious allegations including:

- the use of Commonwealth-owned environmental water for irrigation purposes,
- the allegations of theft and corruption in the management of water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin, and
- the reported breaches within the Murray-Darling Basin, including the Barwon-Darling Water Sharing Plan.

At that time, there were widespread calls for a Federal Royal Commission to thoroughly investigate the allegations. However, you at the time refused to establish such an investigation. Instead, you established a review conducted by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority which had neither transparency or independence from the matter. In response to inadequate action, South Australia has established a state Royal Commission which has only limited powers to investigate interstate and Commonwealth Governments, departments and agencies.

Since July 2017, there have been numerous other allegations of serious misconduct, mismanagement and oversight of water theft by NSW Government and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority itself. It appears that senior management of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority allowed water theft to flourish under their protection. The Northern Basin Amendment tabled by your Government was based on modelling that the Murray Darling Basin Authority openly acknowledges did not take into account the significant changes in the Barwon-Darling Water Sharing Plan made by the NSW Government in 2011/2012.

Today, there have still not being any charges laid against those alleged of serious theft and misappropriation of government funds. None of the investigations to date have effectively addressed all issues which have been identified. This has left Basin communities with little faith in the transparency and integrity of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Without a Federal Independent Commission Against Corruption, there is no independent body which can investigate these allegations. Therefore, I again implore you as Prime Minister to establish a Federal Royal Commission to comprehensively investigate all matters of water theft, mismanagement, misconduct and corruption relating to the Murray Darling Basin, and particularly to the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Our communities depend on a healthy river, and this man-made disaster is killing our river, our environment and our communities. We are therefore writing this as an open letter so that our community voices are heard and listened to, and can be shared.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Robert McBride'.

Robert McBride