

**The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

I refer to your enquiry into the Murray Darling Basin and offer the following for your consideration.

Last year I traveled from Toowoomba to the Coorong by kayak. For over 1000km this journey was on foot, dragging the kayak, because of a shortage of water. During the journey I learned much about the river system. As a civil engineer with 37 years experience in the water industry I was appalled at what I saw.

Very few people understand how the system works. To me it has become a drain. The springs that were in the basin have all but gone. Interconnected ground and surface water no longer interact as they once did. Big flows rush down the river and are gone.

I do not have access to flow data but my instinct tells me that the problems high up, in the small tributaries, are at least as much to blame as the over harvesting in places like St George and Dirranbandi. Certainly a lot goes on that is not even documented. The Darling Downs is particularly bad for people extracting whatever they can get.

In Mannum last year there was a sign in the caravan park that said the water being used to water the lawns was not town water and they had a licence to do it. This year the grass is not watered and there are waterless urinals in the toilet block. At last they understand.

Water restrictions in Shepparton are currently level one. Water is to be transferred out of the basin to Melbourne. Why are different parts of the basin on different restrictions?

There is no doubt that opinions are polarized throughout the basin. Most people think that what they are doing in their area is fine. It is the others that are to blame. The others are always bad managers or just too greedy.

The system will not function properly until the whole basin is controlled by a single entity, prepared to make decisions for the basin. Anything else is ad hoc and doomed to failure. Can we afford to evaporate water in the Menindee Lakes and Lake Victoria? Why is there no water in Wilcannia now, after a La Nina summer? What are we prepared to sacrifice to minimize tragedy? It is not possible now to save everything. There are hard questions that must be answered.

If anyone is interested I do power point presentations on my trip that take people on a journey through the land to give them some insight into what I saw.

Steve Posselt
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