

Senate enquiry on the River Murray, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert and the Coorong.

My wife and I live on the lower reaches of the Finnis River (SA) and are River Murray stock and domestic water licence holders. We have been unable to access River Murray water for in excess of 18 months, ourselves and our stock rely on rain water storages.

We have a number of concerns which we would like to bring to the attention the Senate enquiry but as we do not have the terms of reference our concerns may not fit in with the terms, however!

Our major concern is that the entire Murray Darling basin system is returned in the shortest possible time frame to a healthy working River where the environment of the entire system is the first consideration.

An immediate survey to accurately determine the volume of water that is in storages and that would be available to at least maintain the situation for the coming summer months and maybe enough to improve the situation at the bottom end of the River, the Lakes do not necessarily have to be returned to normal pool level, just to a level that would see water flow over/through the barrages, into the Coorong and out of the River mouth.

An immediate change is required in the way in which the MDB system is managed. A completely independent, non political, non state orientated body needs to be put in place to replace the MDBC. This new body to take control of the entire system, including **ALL** the tributaries in all the states.

Volumetric allocations should be replaced by 'shares' in the available water. Shares could be high and low security shares, low security shares to be available when surplus water is available after the environment and high security shares have been satisfied, this means opportunity annual crops instead of perennial crops that require water every year. In drought conditions all tributaries and the main water courses should have the same restrictions applied.

All the Rivers need to have an end of system flow of reasonable proportions and water needs to flow out of the mouth of the Murray continually to flush salt and other nutrients from the system.

The proposal by the SA Government to construct a weir near Wellington is a folly, it would be a colossal waste of tax payers money. A 1999 MDBC report states that 2.1 million tons of salt comes down the River in a year (5 year average), this equates to nearly 6,000 tons per day. A weir will stop this salt entering the Lakes and will build up behind the weir so much so that the water north of the weir will quickly become unusable, this cancer will spread all the way up the River, given time. The report says that the 2.1m tons per year was expected to double over the next 100 years.

When considering surface water, the other consideration has to be groundwater, it has been proven by numerous "experts" that the two are very closely connected.

All tax incentive schemes for irrigated crops of all kinds should never be considered and any that are currently in place should be stopped immediately. The first priority for irrigation water should be for the production of food, vegetables, fruit, meat and dairy products.

Climate change is being blamed for the situation in which we find ourselves, that may, or may not be part of the equation, the main reasons are the current drought conditions, the gross over allocation of the resource and the miss-management of the Basin. There have been many droughts in the past and conditions have been dire but not to the extent of the present. In 1981 we had our first wake up call and it was ignored, we had another in 2002-2003 and that was all but ignored.

We put our trust with the Senate in the sincere hope that you can come quickly to a positive conclusion and somehow manage to alter the Prime Minister and the Water Minister's approach to what could very easily turn into a major catastrophe, if hasn't already reached that point.

Yours sincerely,
Bruce and Annette Allnutt