

11th September, 2008

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Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
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Senate inquiry into water management of the Lower Lakes and Coorong

I write as a concerned resident of Milang and someone who has been an advocate for Wetlands in our region over the past 9 years.

An ecological disaster is happening now. We have no more time to wait. I believe the government should call a "State of Emergency". All current State water sharing agreements should become null and void. The new national Basin Authority should take over management of the whole system. All water licence holders should be compelled to return to the Authority a percentage of their license (my suggestion would be 20%). The value of this permanent reduction would soon be recouped by license holders as the value of the water would soon increase to match the previous 100% value. It would also more quickly bring about more effective irrigation infrastructure or changes in agricultural production to enable businesses to stay profitable. I suggest this measure as it is quite clear that more water is allocated from the system than there is water available and that there are not enough willing sellers to make the Govt buy back effective in the short term.

We have known for a long time that there have not been sufficient flows down the Murray to sustain the Lakes and Coorong environment. It is quite clear that the needs of the environment are last on the list and therefore it never gets a fair share of what water is available. I would suggest that Prof Mike Young's Future Proofed Basin plan which considers how much end of river flow is required to maintain a healthy system and allocates that first and then delivers an equal share to communities, industry and the environment is the sensible approach.

In the short term local rain and tributary flows have helped to stave off the acid sulphate soils problem for a bit longer. We do not need enough water to fill the lakes to their previous level of .75AHD. They could be managed at a permanently reduced level ie .30 to .40 AHD would reduce the evaporation levels which is a much raised criticism from upstream users. New evidence (Bruce Brooks & Mike South) suggests that the water balance levels in the lakes are much less than the figures usually touted.

Should things become desperate over the forthcoming summer then the weir pools up river, which I believe are being held at a high level, could be lowered by 100ml to allow sufficient water to maintain the lakes at the existing levels.

I have attached copies of three speeches that I have presented in 2007 & 2008 to community events. I hope that they will more clearly outline what I see happening here, why the weir is a seriously flawed solution, why we must maintain the Lakes as a freshwater system and why rivers must flow to the sea.

I encourage you to put the environment as a number one priority, for without a healthy river system we will not be able to maintain healthy communities and economies.

Yours sincerely

Karyn Bradford

ATT - Murray Vigil Speech 2008

Water Symposium Speech 2007

World Wetlands Day Speech 2007

MURRAY VIGIL SPEECH GOOLWA 10th Aug 2008

I'm from a 4th generation farming family at Milang. I'm heartbroken that we are here today mourning the dying Murray.

I can't believe that on our watch things have got this bad.

Over allocation of water from the rivers of the Murray Darling Basin, exacerbated by drought has seen the river flow reduced to a trickle. This is causing despair and hardship to families, businesses & communities.

Tourism businesses around the rivers and Lakes are suffering, less visitors, less income. Stock breeding and farming experience developed over generations is being lost. Losing your family business or family farm or having to move from a place that you love, to find another job is gut wrenching. Communities are experiencing the pain and individuals are stressed, depressed & physically ill.

We all know there is something terribly wrong. We know because we're locals, we live with it daily and we really care about what happens here. We're concerned about our neighbours, we care about this Australian icon, the Coorong, Lakes and River.

What's happening is simply not good enough. Traditional wisdom urges us to look after the land and waters and the land and waters will look after us. To have healthy communities and economies we must have a healthy living river.

We've been listening and talking for a long time but it hasn't got us anywhere. I for one am sick and tired of feeling powerless and frustrated.

Yes! We do need a solution but we want the best solution, not the easiest solution, or the politically expedient solution, or the quick risky solution.

250gl of fresh water flowing down the river to the Murray Mouth giving hope to communities, and revitalizing the environment is the best solution

The water is there, it can be released. The science predicts the catastrophe that will happen if we don't act now. We expect courage. We demand leadership from Canberra. Our message is clear. The Murray River must flow to the mouth.

We have the power to make a difference but we must stand united. Write letters. Tell your families and friends both here and interstate what's happening here.

Together we are the best weapon in the fight to save our river, our lakes, our Coorong. We must let our river run.

Karyn Bradford for Goolwa Vigil 10 Aug 2008

Karyn Bradford - Water Symposium, Strathalbyn - 13th April 2007

Our theme today has been about water. Governments are talking (or not talking) about who should look after water. Water is part of our psyche - we dream about it, want to live as close as we can to it, want to see it from our windows, we play in and around it and we certainly can't survive without it. I've lived at Milang all of my life and so have some wonderful recollections about water. I went to learn to swim lessons in the lake, yabbying with a scruffy old yabby pot that my Nan made for me of chicken wire and hessian, ate congoli that my grandfather had caught, river fish like congoli and callop are still my favourite today. I'm sure you've got wonderful water based memories too.

Water expressions have become included in our language. We 'test the water' or we might be 'in over our heads' or 'all at sea'. We might 'go to water' and for something that happened in the past we say it was 'water under the bridge'. Right at the moment I'd say we're really 'in hot water'.

Our religions also have water playing a key role in rebirth and purification. At a funeral service Buddhist monks fill a bowl to overflowing while reciting 'as the rains fill the rivers and overflow into the oceans, so likewise may what is given here reach the departed'.

All of Australia's major cities are built along the country's coastline, away from its arid interior. They all centre around natural water features like deep harbours and rivers. Those features provide water supplies, transport and recreation facilities.

Look at the current trend for people to include ponds and fountains in their homes and gardens and the number of house interiors that have water inspired colours and motifs.

Look also at Australians love affair with water sports, swimming, sailing, water polo, triathlons. Water recreation is also high on our list of priorities, boating, swimming, fishing.

Yet with all of this focus on water many have lost empathy for water and the environment. We enjoy and take for granted water and we've forgotten that the environment can't speak for itself, that its imperative for all of us to protect water.

I guess that question is why have we let this happen. Dr John Williams from CSIRO would say that it is because there are three myths that dominate Australians thinking where water is concerned.

We must drought-proof Australia

We must make the desert bloom

Water allowed to run to the sea is wasted.

The idea of 'drought-proofing' our drier areas is fraught with risk, because it involves bringing water to places where, normally, it is only there occasionally. 'The critical need is not to drought-proof the inland - that is impossible. It is to myth-proof Australians. If we are to become real Australians, not merely transplants, we need to fully come to terms with the nature of our continent, its rivers and landscape'.

The second myth - making the desert bloom by turning coastal rivers to run inland - is as much

in vogue today as it was 100 years ago.

'Only recently', notes Dr. Williams, 'we heard plans put forward to revive the Bradfield Scheme, a 1930's plan to turn the Tully and Herbert rivers back across the divide into Central Queensland. Two centuries of development in Australia seem to have taught us little about the risks of salinity, land and water degradation, loss of habitat and species'.

The third myth is the one that I would like to focus on today.

Dr Williams says that 'The natural flow of water down a river to the sea is part of a healthy system. It is when we prevent this by damming, building weirs and taking out too much of the flow for other uses, that the river's health is placed at risk'.

'The Australian landscape, its plants and animals, have evolved to cope with episodic flooding', says Dr Williams. "By taking out the water and preventing floods, we need to be aware we are also destroying that landscape and the rivers that give life to it.'

At my end of the river it is patently obvious that we are destroying the river environment through overallocation. The government's announcement of a proposed weir at Wellington to completely disconnect the river from it's estuary was a plan that would devastate the Coorong Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Ramsar site that myself and so many other locals had been working to protect..

How did the November weir announcement make me feel? - First of all I couldn't believe that it was even being entertained, then when it became obvious that things were serious then I began to feel a sense of devastation and powerlessness.

Glenn Albrecht from the University of Newcastle has given this condition a name - Solastalgia. The diagnosis of solastalgia is based on the recognition of the distress within an individual or a community about the loss of 'endemic sense of place' and the loss of a sense of control of its destiny. I suspect that solastalgia can be diagnosed in people along the length and breadth of the Murray Darling Basin and in all the drought effected areas across the nation. In areas affected by prolonged drought desolation to both farmers and the landscape occurs. Research undertaken on the mental health aspects of the drought have concluded that it is not just large scale landscape change (loss of vegetation, dust storms, dead animals, starving animals etc), it is also smaller scale events like the loss of a much loved farmhouse garden that finally trip people over into solastalgically induced depression and illness[1]. Similar situations occur when citizens and communities experience severe impacts from man made activities like open cut mining. Dust, noise, machines, explosions and pollution all have their effects and a once much loved landscape can be dramatically transformed by such activity. Research in Australia conducted by Glenn Albrecht and colleagues has found clear connections between the loss of ecosystem health and felt declines in both physical and mental health of those affected by large scale industrial activity.

Some of you will know that I have been an advocate for wetlands and as a Land and Water Australia Community Fellow I have travelled around Australia sharing stories about the Milang wetlands and snipe sanctuary.

Most of the time I have been sharing the message with community and landholder groups who are already working locally to care for their own wetland areas. 'I have seen communities taking back the power, they value the ecosystem services provided by native vegetation, recognise the

importance of environmental flows in our rivers, and reward their locals for environmental stewardship. This type of activity is the cure for solastalgia.

Glenn Albrecht says that “Individuals are empowered through acknowledging things that need to be confronted. A commitment to engage in action to cooperate with and support distressed people and heal distressed environments is itself a profoundly healing act. As was found in the British context of foot and mouth disease, engagement in human support networks is an important counter to the solastalgic distress caused by various forms of disaster.”

Our river is in a state of crisis.

Our future depends on its wise management.

We must shatter the myths about our water and let our wetlands and the environment have a fair share

We must let our rivers run.

I am asking you to stand up for the environment.

I'm asking you all to fight

Our generation can leave a legacy of living rivers and healthy landscapes

But it will take a commitment from each and every one of us to bring about change. You'll feel better for taking action - I know that I do

Yes we can make a difference

We already have.

WORLD WETLANDS DAY TALK 2007 for WALK FOR THE WETLANDS, MILANG

It was four years ago today that we gathered together on World Wetlands Day with the Governor of SA Marjorie Jackson Nelson to acknowledge the work done by the Milang 2005 group to protect the Milang Wetlands.

That small group of locals worked really hard over 4 years to change our perceptions. Our mozzie infested swamp became a wonderful wetland full of interesting creatures and we learnt to value our wet areas for their intrinsic values and for their contribution to our environment.

We learnt that bats fly over the wetlands at night and eat their body weight in insects, we learnt that lignums make great homes for wrens and robins and we also discovered that the wading bird "Japanese Snipe" fly all the way from Northern Japan to summer over in our wetlands where the food is plentiful.

World Wetlands Day today celebrates the signing of an international treaty in Ramsar, Iran which commits signatories to the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world, the Coorong Lakes Alexandrina and Albert are a nominated Ramsar site and at 140000 hectares one of the largest sites in Australia.

Some of you will know that I have been an advocate for wetlands and as a Land and Water Australia Community Fellow I have travelled around Australia sharing stories about the Milang wetlands and snipe sanctuary. I've been as far afield as Dunsbrough in the West to Yamba in the East to tell the story about how our community made a positive difference to the environment through our care and protection of our wetlands.

It appears that I should have travelled further, spoke more and shared our story often, particularly up and down the Murray Darling Basin so that more people became aware of the importance of wetlands.

Today freshwater wetlands cover 1% of the earth's surface yet they support 12 % of all animal species. Sadly, half of the world wetlands have been destroyed over the past 100 years. Wetlands still continue to be a neglected part of the planet's natural wealth. We need to care for our wetlands and stop treating them like wastelands.

Wetlands come in many types, shapes and sizes from the bit of boggy ground down the back paddock to the rivers billabongs and massive expanses like the Lakes and Coorong. What is important to remember that many wetlands have a natural cycle of wetting and drying.

These wetlands that we look over today support a diverse range of plants and animals like tortoises, frogs, fish and birds and provide habitat and refuge for many migratory and threatened species; Right at the moment the lakes are a significant drought refuge for water birds as their usual wet areas dry up.

In particular these lakes purify water by filtering nutrients and sediments and these lakes have an enormous role to play in that respect as they have the entire (although very reduced) flow of the Murray and Darling rivers passing through them.

Wetlands can play an essential role in natural hydrological cycles, provide water passage and storage, and may contribute to flood mitigation and the recharge of groundwater.

The lakes contribute to the economic productivity of the region by providing essential water sources for agricultural, fish resources, and fodder for livestock grazing;

These wetlands also feature significantly in the cultural heritage, spiritual values, and day-to-day living of the Narrindjeri. I'm sure that you would all agree with me that they also contribute to the well-being of people through landscape diversity, heritage values and aesthetic appeal; I can't imagine living here without the Lake, can you?.....

I would not normally see myself as an activist but I stand here before you today in my gold stop the weir t-shirt because I believe that the proposed weir below Wellington is an enormous threat to the environment of Lakes Alexandrina, Albert and the Coorong. If I sat back and said nothing and the devastation that comes about because of the weir, and make no mistake it will be gut wrenching devastation to the environment and the lakes and Coorong communities, I would feel that I had let my children and future generations down.

My friends, old and new, on the River, Lakes and Coorong Action groups feel the same. We are working in close collaboration with the other groups at Meningie, Narrung, Wellington and Langhorne Creek who are also very concerned.

I want to explain to you today how that lakes and Coorong work so that you understand and can help us to explain to others why the weir won't work. It will take a commitment from each and every one of us to bring pressure on the state cabinet to find a more sustainable solution.

We can bounce back from a drought, but we cannot bounce back from more human interference.

We understand that the decision is yet to be made, but the Governments favoured option is to have the weir completed in the summer of this year if the drought continues.

It appears that the most favoured position for the weir is way down in the neck of the river where it joins to the lake. We are told that the weir will be 2.5km long and that the side sections will be solid rock walls with just a 500m removable weir section in the centre.

The lakes and Coorong is the estuary for the whole Murray River. It is a wetland and it has evolved over thousands of years to do exactly what wetlands are designed to do, remove wastes and nutrients from the system.

The Murray Mouth works like our kidneys expelling salts and nutrients from the whole system. The lakes work like the lungs. Prevailing winds crossing the lake from the south create waves on the lakes which serve to oxygenate the water. This water is then pushed up into the lower river taking oxygenated water into those lower reaches and returning with salts and nutrients when the wind drops. You will have seen in the papers how this happened when we had that particularly strong blow from the SW a week ago and boats and Goolwa, Clayton and Milang were left high and dry. Up below Lock 1 they had an additional metre of water for a day.

The proposed weir, temporary or not will disconnect the river from the lakes and prevent this vital circulation of oxygenated water. Effectively the weir will create two stagnant ponds, one above and one below the weir. We are told the weir is really to secure Adelaide's water supply and to stop the water from evaporating off the lakes and being wasted out to sea. This is a furphy because the water above the weir will become a polluted stagnant soup susceptible to blue green algae.

Our river will become so degraded that the damage will be irreversible. The water will no longer be suitable for consumption. It will no longer support life.

I want you to take a good look at the lake today because if the weir goes ahead things will never be the same again.

And the scary thing is that this is happening now - in our lifetime, not someone else's.

The River, Lakes and Coorong Action group has vowed to fight on two fronts

Firstly – stop the weir

Secondly - to stop over allocation of water from the Murray and return water to the system.

The time to act is now

Our river is in a state of crisis.

Our future depends on its wise management.

Lets fight so that our generation can leave a legacy of living rivers and healthy landscapes – not drains and dustbowls.

Write to the pollies, Show your support at other events such as the rally at Parliament House. Donate to the fighting fund, Talk to your friends particularly those in the city and tell them that the weir will not solve Adelaide's water woes, email out to your networks, register on stoptheweir.com and keep informed about the progress of the campaign, proudly wear your campaign clobber.

We have the power to make a difference.

Spread the word, get as many people onside as possible, keep an open mind and become proactive. You need to learn as much as you can and share it with the wider community. Take the time to explain, educate and help to raise awareness because you, as locals and concerned citizens will be the best weapons in the fight to save our wetlands, our rivers and lakes

We must let our river run.

Karyn Bradford

Milang Resident and Land and Water Australia Community Fellow

