

Appendix 4

Recent press articles and NSW Office of Environment and Heritage documentation regarding proposed relaxed flow constraints at Mundarlo Bridge on the Murrumbidgee River

Upper Murrumbidgee Environmental Flows Enhancement Project

What is the project about?

The project is examining the potential benefits and impacts of relaxing the flow constraint at Mundarlo Bridge on the Murrumbidgee River (30km downstream of Gundagai). Potentially higher flow thresholds are being considered that would allow environmental flow releases to be delivered more efficiently to the downstream environment, and in particular the mid-Murrumbidgee wetlands.



What stage is the project at?

Detailed modelling and consultation with key stakeholders is being undertaken to understand and identify potential opportunities, impacts, constraints and benefits associated with a higher flow threshold at Mundarlo Bridge. The project team is now seeking feedback on the modelling results from local community members to inform the options assessment phase of the project.



What are the benefits of this project?

- improve water quality and flows in the lower Murrumbidgee
- improve connectivity of wetlands between Wagga Wagga and Hay
- enhance fishing opportunities in the lower Murrumbidgee near Hay and Balranald
- boost recreational and tourism benefits stemming from improved wetland health and additional bird breeding
- require a higher bridge at Mundarlo which will reduce disruption to local traffic during flood events
- provide greater flexibility in managing water releases as part of flood mitigation.

What are the expected inundation levels?

- the floodplain modelling indicates some increases in inundation of riparian land
- all potential higher flows being examined are below the minor flood level (6.1m at Gundagai, 7.3m at Wagga Wagga, 6.7m at Narrandera, 5.5m at Darlington Point)
- the maximum flow threshold is likely to be similar to the peak flow experienced during the September 2010 event, which was considered a successful environmental watering event for mid-Murrumbidgee wetlands.

When and how often would higher flows occur?

- the release of environment flows depends on the condition and needs of the wetlands to be watered
- this could range from once every two to five years depending on water availability
- opportunities to release managed environmental flows are likely to occur in spring/early summer.
- the community would be notified well in advance of any planned water releases.

9.3.13

Point farmers seeing red

► MURRUMBIDGEE RIVER

DARLINGTON Point farmers and regional leaders have reacted with horror at a plan to force thousands of extra megalitres of water down the Murrumbidgee River.

The NSW Office of Environment and Heritage has unveiled a proposal to remove constraints, including the Mandarlio Bridge upstream of Gundagai, to increase

environmental flows in the river. The department held a meeting in Darlington Point last month to gauge reaction to the proposal and was told it could spark wholesale flooding of local farms and impact tourism in river red gum parks.

Murrumbidgee mayor Phil Wells said the implications of up

to 13,000 extra megalitres being pumped under the Mandarlio Bridge daily could be "devastating" for his shire.

"They call them (the river red gum areas at the Point) wetlands, but they're actually lagoons and they are meant to be flooded in a natural flood event, which might only be every four or five years,"

Councillor Wells said. "These sort of high flows would give us no beaches and give tourists no access to river red gum parks."

He said there were also fears the extra water would inundate local farming properties.

"All through the basin plan process, we were told farmers

would have to be smarter and start using new technologies," Cr Wells said.

"Why can't the Office of Environment and Water do the same?"

"We don't need over-bank flooding to flood these local sites, they can pump and channel it in."

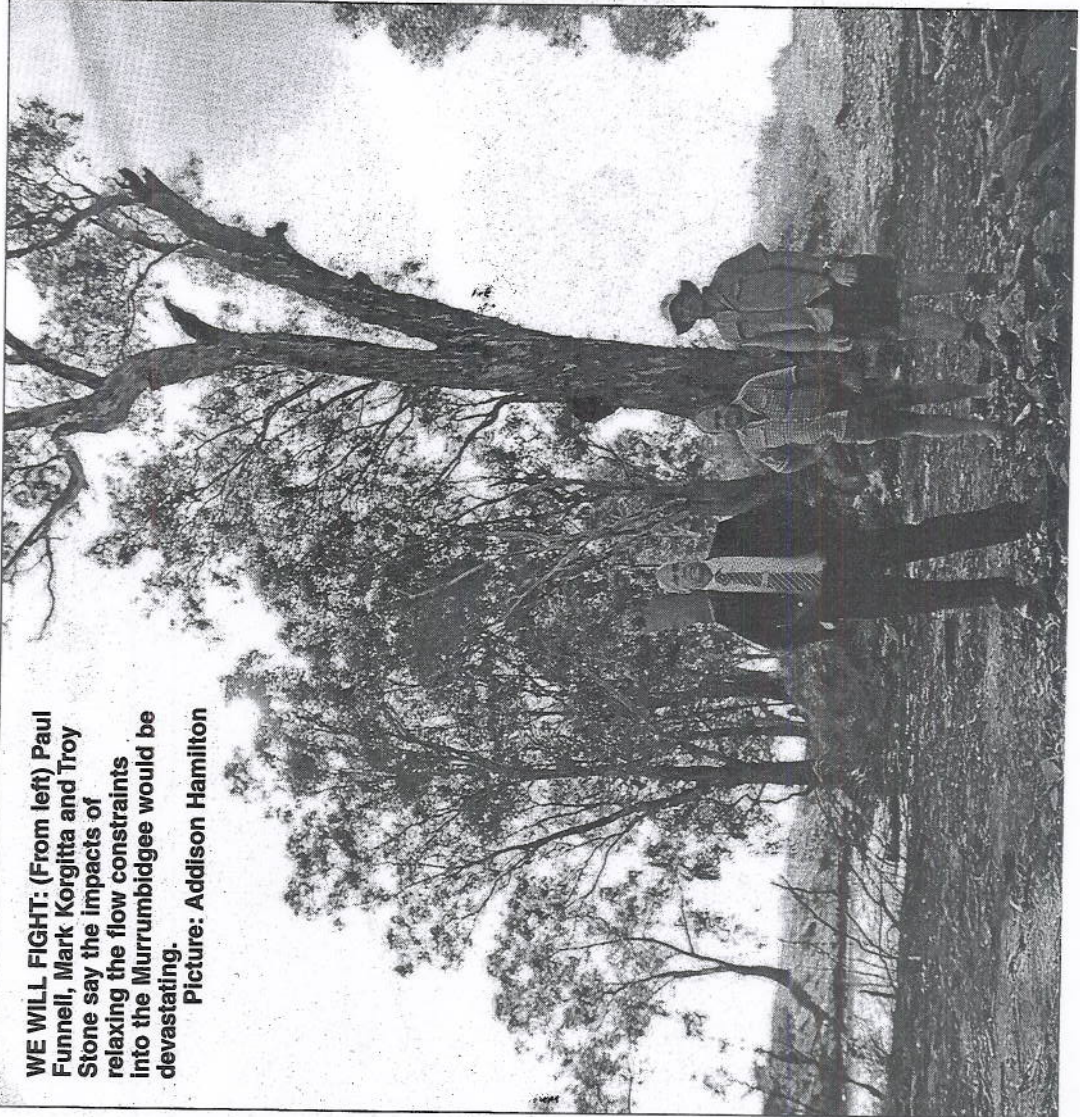
Murrumbidgee council has made a formal objection to the proposal.

- The Area News

Plan would 'finish farmers'

WE WILL FIGHT: (From left) Paul Funnell, Mark Korgitta and Troy Stone say the impacts of relaxing the flow constraints into the Murrumbidgee would be devastating.

Picture: Addison Hamilton



By Ashleigh Gleeson

THE impact will be much more serious than a few pumps going under - it will put lives at risk, cost millions of dollars and damage the environment.

That was the message angry farmers took with them to an Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) public consultation meeting held in Collingullie yesterday.

OEH is tasked with submitting a report in two months on the feasibility of increasing releases into the Murrumbidgee at Mundarlo Bridge, near Gundagai.

The higher flows would be 6.1 metres at Gundagai, 7.3 metres at Wagga and 6.7 metres at Narrandera.

One of the main questions raised at the meeting yesterday was why Wagga's Floodplain Risk Management Advisory Committee and the chairman of Riverina Water knew little about the proposals.

Farmers also raised concerns for the red gum forest with no apparent research done into what negative impacts the changing conditions would have, as well as erosion to the river banks.

"Can you play God and say it is not going to rain for two weeks?" was a question asked by Collingullie farmer Troy Stone. "Who actually rings up and says I want 7.3 metres to come through?" he asked.

"When someone puts all this together they say we're connected to

the river but have no figures to show that, I'm looking for science behind it." Leading Wagga solicitor and landowner at Euberta, Tim Abbott, said he would sue if the proposals went ahead.

"The damage they would create would be in the millions of dollars," he said.

"If they want to do it I will sue their a--e off.

"I'm happy to take on claims for everybody on the river."

Democratic Labor Party branch president and Wagga City Councillor Paul Funnell is on Wagga's Floodplain Committee and spoke at great length at yesterday's meeting. An owner of land near Collingullie, he labelled what was happening as "environmental terrorism".

"You are destroying the lives of thousands of people all supposedly under the guise of the environment," he said.

"If you push six metres of water down the river you will flood to a major extent the Berry Jerry State Forest. The economic ramifications of this are a finality, we're finished.

"We want real consultation - the people are fed up. We are not going away."

OEH says increasing the water flows would improve water quality and connectivity to wetlands, enhance fishing opportunities and "provide greater flexibility in managing water releases as part of flood mitigation".

17. 2. 13

The Daily Advertiser

Macca's rumour denied



▶WAGGA

PERSISTENT rumours another McDonald's store will open in the city soon are just rumours according to Wagga franchisee Tony Aichinger.

But a fifth store hasn't been entirely ruled out.

It is understood the business may be looking into establishing a new store on the corner of Koorringal Road and the Sturt Highway.

...site the soon-to-be million

Potential flood victims meeting to fight plan

▶WAGGA

By Ken Grimson

A PUBLIC meeting will be held in Wagga on Monday to gauge concerns about environmental flows down the Murrumbidgee River which some rural landholders fear will wreak massive flood damage on their properties.

Anger about the flows is so high that some landholders are threatening to sue whichever government they work out is responsible for the inundation.

The focus of their worries is what is known as the Upper Murrumbidgee Environmental Flows Enhancement Project.

It could result in the Murrumbidgee River reaching heights of up to 7.3 metres, a level

which Euberta landholder and Wagga lawyer Tim Abbott claims would cause immense damage not only to his property and others, but also financial losses for Murrumbidgee valley businesses and councils.

Mr Abbott said a meeting would be held at the Wagga Commercial Club at 7.30pm on Monday and everyone - not just affected rural producers - were welcome to attend so their concerns could be passed on to government.

"These fools (in government) might then become aware of the number of people affected, the cost and the effect of the flooding and think it is not such a good idea," Mr Abbott said.

Wagga City Councillor Paul Funnell has a property between Collingullie and Currawarna that he believes will go under from a

"man-made" flood. He is organising Monday's meeting with Mr Abbott.

"At that level (7.3m) Wagga goes into flood mode," Councillor Funnell said. "It has the potential to destroy people's livelihoods and land."

Mr Abbott has fired off a letter to member for Wagga, Daryl Maguire, warning that government will be held accountable for any flood losses.

He has made application for documents through Government Information Public Access to try to find which level of government is responsible for the plans.

"You don't know whether it is federal or state, who is making the decisions," Mr Abbott said.

Mr Maguire defended the state government, saying it did not create the environmental flow problems and was trying to deal with them the best it could.



Tim Abbott

Thoughts sought on greater water release

► MURRUMBIDGEE

THE NSW government wants to know what you think about releasing more water into the Murrumbidgee River.

The Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) will be holding public information sessions next month to discuss allowing a higher water flow threshold into the Murrumbidgee, near Gundagai.

The proposed increase comes at a time when the amount of water flowing from Blowering and Burrinjuck dams is the highest seen in more than a decade.

OEH is investigating the potential impacts and benefits a higher flow threshold would have on floodplain landholders, waters users and the environment.

Because the height of Mundarlo

Information sessions

- 8am to 10am Tuesday, February 12
Gundagai District Services Club, 254 Sheridan Street, Gundagai
- 4pm to 6pm Oura Community Centre, Oura Road, Oura
- 8am to 10am Wednesday, February 13
Collingullie Memorial Hall, Sturt Highway, Collingullie
- 4pm to 6pm Narrandera-Bowles Club, corner of Jonsen and Bolton streets, Narrandera
- 8am to 10am Thursday, February 14
Darlington Point Club, DeMarniel Street, Darlington Point
- 4pm to 6pm Hay War Memorial Hall, 202 Lachlan Street, Hay
- 8am to 10am Friday, February 15
Balranald Royal Theatre, 88 to 92 Market Street, Balranald

Bridge limits the volume of regulated water that can pass through the river, OEH is considering raising or replacing the bridge to cater for the increases.

"The height of Mundarlo Bridge currently limits the volume of

"The project team has undertaken detailed floodplain modelling and consulted with landholder groups, irrigation groups, traditional owners, government agencies and other key stakeholders to introduce the project and identify potential impacts, constraints and benefits."

Mr Rutherford said the potential higher flow thresholds being considered by the study remained below the minor flood level.

The maximum flow that can be passed in the Murrumbidgee before water overtops the Mundarlo Bridge at the moment is 32,000 megalitres a day.

For details on the dates and times of information sessions, or for general information, the project team can be contacted on 1800 991 305 or at murrumbidgeeflows@globalism.com.

regulated water that can be passed through the Murrumbidgee River and this is a key constraint to both environmental water management and general river options," OEH director waters, wetlands and coast Derek Rutherford said.

Temperers flare at meeting

► WAGGA

By Alex McConachie

OUTRAGE at a proposal by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) to send increased environmental flows down the Murrumbidgee was on full show at a meeting of Wagga landholders last night.

The increased flows could see some landholders around the region facing inundation on large sections of their properties and many are furious at the OEH's proposal.

But the serious ramifications of the proposal aren't limited to just rural property owners, with Wagga also set to face serious consequences if the Murrumbidgee were raised to 7.3 metres, according to Wagga councillor Paul Funnell, who chaired last night's meeting.

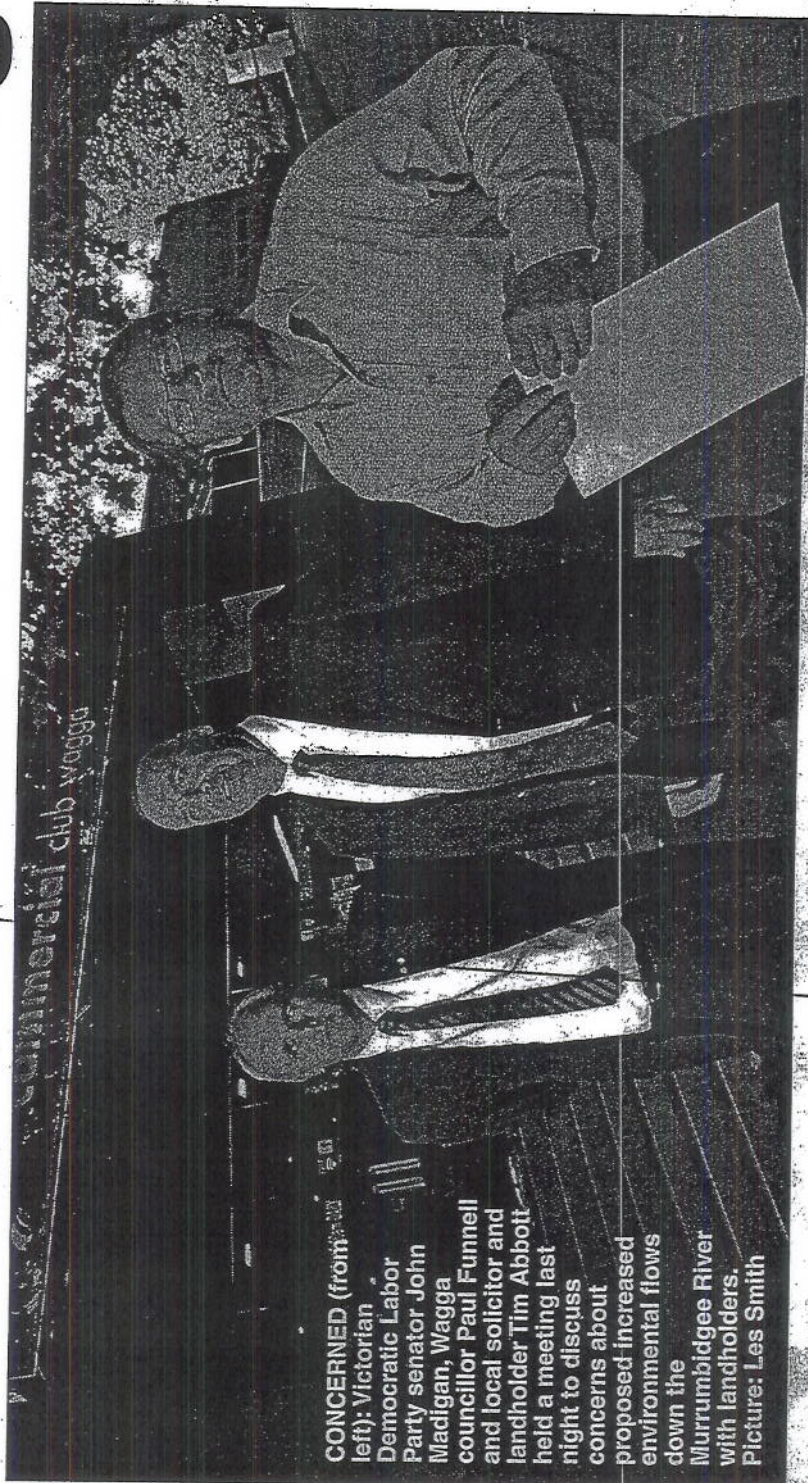
"If we get a 7.3-metre river, eight flood-gates close in Wagga," he said.

"That puts our stormwater infrastructure in a questionable position.

"If we get a rain event in our catchment area - which is thousands of square kilometres - Wagga becomes a bucket that will fill up."

Helping to spearhead the opposition to the OEH's proposal along with Cr Funnell is local solicitor and landholder Tim Abbott, who would see close to 80 per cent of his property go underwater at the river heights the OEH is proposing.

Mr Abbott lashed out at the incompetence of the OEH over the proposal, claiming the department was in the dark on how



CONCERNED (from left): Victorian Democratic Labor Party senator John Madigan, Wagga councillor Paul Funnell and local solicitor and landholder Tim Abbott held a meeting last night to discuss concerns about proposed increased environmental flows down the Murrumbidgee River with landholders. Picture: Les Smith

they planned to implement the proposal, or of its consequences.

"I can tell you now that you can pay an expert anything to tell you anything," he said.

"Even when they're being honest and independent they get it wrong."

Last night's meeting resolved to form a committee of concerned landholders to present a united voice to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, who will consider a report from the OEH over the issue in April.

Victorian Democratic Labor Party senator

John Madigan, who is concerned about what ramifications this proposal may have for Victorian communities, also addressed the meeting last night, telling landholders that the proposal was "ludicrous".

"If these people were paid on performance they'd bloody well starve," he said.

