

Dear Phillip,

Thank you for your considered and prompt response to my letter.

I am aware that the State government has a meeting about the Coorong South Lagoon planned for 5 June. I will not be attending. My view is that this meeting is not about expert science but a broader meeting involving a suite of vested interest groups such that the decisions made will be based on the majoritative or populist view of what is best for the southern Coorong (i.e. best for the vested interest groups) and not based on the scientific evidence and merits. The state government knows my position and opposition to the planned releases of freshwater into the southern Coorong because of the likely real impacts on the unique biota of the Coorong (and the MDBA also receives my reports on this). I should not need to be present on June 5 to have my views aired and discussed and it will be interesting to see if they are discussed in my absence.

Schedule 6 of the Murray Darling Basin Plan does not provide any safeguards for the health of the Coorong. The notion that salinities in the southern Coorong need to be below 100g/L on 96% of the days means any salinity below that is acceptable and so the whole south lagoon could be turned into a freshwater system (0g/L) or an estuarine system (<35 g/L). Even dropping below 80g/L will change the unique biotic attributes of the South Lagoon. To be honest there needs to be more than 4% days above 100g/L. Importantly nowhere in schedule 6 does the plan protect migratory shorebirds or the on-going presence of *Ruppia tuberosa* – key elements of the southern Coorong. These are two basin-wide reportables. Surprisingly there is no reference to the EPBC Act within the MDB Plan.

The crux of my letter was that there is ecological damage being done now. I cannot see how further releases of freshwater will prevent ongoing and escalating damage and wise managers know that it is far better to prevent this from occurring than to wait until it has occurred and then try to rectify the problem. By then it will be too late because the damage will truly be irreversible. It may well be too late now. One can debate the source of the nutrients and algae – but the algae is in Salt Creek before the water is released into the Coorong so this is the logical and parsimonious explanation for the source (and was raised as a significant risk in the original EIS for the releases that are taking place at the moment). Sadly few people actually go and have a look at what is actually happening at the critical times in the year.

The wording for schedule 6 in the Basin Plan around salinity levels in the southern Coorong may provide a convenient escape for both State and Federal government agencies but it does not actually protect the southern Coorong and its unique biota. I assume there is no capacity to revisit the wording for schedule 6 to include biotic aspects as part of the deliverables?

Thank you for forwarding my letter to the State government agency. I had written separately to both the SA Premier and the Federal Environment Minister to determine their positions about the management of the Coorong and specifically their response to releases of more freshwater into the southern Coorong. These focussed on whether the EPBC Act had been adequately considered in advancing the proposed SDLAM. Going on recent experience I do not expect to receive a response anytime soon but I will forward their responses to you so there is some transparency.

Kind regards,

David