

Submission to the Royal Commission into the Murray Darling Basin Authority

Comment on Poorly Managed Environmental Water / Flows !

RE: Strategic management of the Environmental Water Holdings which is not achieving the outcomes promised with the adoption of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

The Murray River Flood Plain downstream of Barmah and through to South Australia had several large over bank floods / flows in the 1950s which produced everything you could reasonably expect, regeneration of flora great habitat for fauna, the flood plain was healthy and looked fantastic for years afterwards.

During the 70s and 80s several lesser over bank floods occurred which maintained the health of the floodplain. From the late 1980s it is difficult to remember a significant over Bank flood in the past 30 years that has impacted beneficially on the health of the Murray River floodplain. The Murray River floodplain reflects the lack of having been wetted up over the last 30 years.

In the Spring of 2016 there was a natural high river event that had the Murray River within centimetres of going over the bank and on to the floodplain. Had there been an environmental release of environmental water at that time the floodplain would have been flooded. The environmental water release could have piggy backed on the natural high river at the time and for minimal additional flow of environmental water the health of the floodplain could have been restored for a few years.

The Murray Darling Basin Authority had this golden opportunity to top up a natural flow with a minimal amount of Environmental water for the benefit of every aspect of the environment, being aquatic life, native forests, wetlands, birdlife and other flora and fauna. It is even more disappointing as the Environmental Water was actually available.

The Environmental Water was available at that time as is illustrated by the fact the environmental manager subsequently sold environmental water as most of the low fruit, the billabongs and easily accessible wet lands were wetted up with the moderately high river, so there was no need to artificially fill the chosen Icon sites.

When asked why this was not being done the authorities said the third party impact to the farmers and farming on the floodplain below Hume Weir was too big a battle and too expensive to contemplate. Yet this simply replicates historic natural river flows. So the full length of the Murray River floodplain will continue to deteriorate faster, as there will be less chance of getting an over the bank flood if the status quo remains. No flood water from the Hume, no flood water from the Darling to the Murray and less from the Murrumbidgee.

BirdLife Australia



The Same Scenario applies to the Flood Plain of the Lower Darling River in New South Wales which is in extremely poor health having been neglected for years. The new pipeline to Broken Hill drawing water from the Murray River at Wentworth instead of the Darling River will inevitably give less incentive to authorities to promote flood flows in the Darling River. The native forests that rely on the occasional flood are dying now.

We are also Critical of the management and the way the environmental water is being used continuously on not only Icon sites such as Hattah Lakes but on other sites where they are kept continuously at a high level and not allowing to have a drying phase. In some locations the Red Gum Saplings are so dense it is difficult to see the water. This is not mimicking the natural flood Cycle, and there will be a great cost to thin these Saplings.

Mildura Birdlife would like to see the MDBC take an active approach to managing water flows in the Murray and Darling rivers to really benefit the environmental needs of the floodplains of both river systems. State and Federal Environment Departments exist to provide advice for exactly this purpose.

Birdlife Mildura is a branch of Birdlife Australia and comprises about 40 members of all ages who are passionate about our native birds and the habitats that support them. We are an active group which conducts social outings to observe birds in the wild both locally on the Murray and Darling river floodplains and beyond and we support various scientific bird studies in our part of Australia.

Yours faithfully,

for

Peter Dunstan

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