

With regards Review of the Operations of the Cap by Project Board, I agree with the placement of a cap on the extraction of water from the rivers of the Murray Darling Basin.

I do not agree the Murray Darling Basin is as degraded as much as a lot of brainwashed people are believing.

In 1902 there was rotting fish from one end of the rivers to the other and the water was undrinkable and from this experience the decision to build weirs and reservoirs was made.

Sturt found the water in the Darling too salty for drinking when he was exploring in the early 1800's.

In 1949 and other years about this time, the Billabong Creek dried up and water was carted to Jerilderie by train and rationed out to the residents. That does not happen today.

Agreed, there is not as many native fish as there used to be but there could be many reasons for that ie maybe there are a lot more pelicans and shags and water birds that subsist on fish and fishermen with nets etc who have taken out much of the breeding stock.

In regards to the Project Board's claim the Cap has improved security and created a climate for long term investment and development. Nothing could be further from the truth. It may not be within the Project Board's charter but the overall management of the waters over the last 5 years has been pathetic; maybe very close to the crime of treason; it has for the average farming family created utter confusion and financial resources which should have been put to improving farm lands and the environment such as land lasering and planting trees has had to be committed to buying water in many cases from sellers who could well be labelled as scalpers.

I do not agree that simply running more water down the river will solve the problems and the claim that the water being pumped to Adelaide will be undrinkable in a few short years requires a really good hard investigation.

I believe South Australia is entitled to a better quality water than it now has and there must be a way. At present and over the past years, water quality in the Murray deteriorates at an alarming rate once it crosses the South Australian border. Why is this so?

The Murray Darling Basin Commission weekly report of 2 July, 1997 states the river salinity at Morgan increased during the week to 750 EC primarily to a recent release of saline water to the river from an evaporation basin in South Australia. If we did that here in the Riverina we would be put in gaol.

We don't claim to have all the answers but if you peruse the Murray Darling Basin Commission records over the past five years you will probably find in

1997, although South Australia did not receive much over their minimum supply, the quality was a good or maybe better than any other year.

Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert hold back about 2,000,000 megalitres of water which evaporates more water than is used for the much maligned rice crop in the Riverina. Much water is held in Chowwilla to support birds under an International agreement but does it make a big contribution to saline underground water being pushed back into the Murray?

The idea of diverting the water to where it has the best monetary value is about as sensible as chasing rainbows. Rice, wheat and meat are staple foods for many people but wine is just icing on the cake. It is very nice in moderation but if Australia and the World is to consume all the wine being produced and projected throughout the world it will be as cheap as water and we will all be alcoholics.

The decision of COAG in 1994 in Hobart to sell water to the highest bidder within a few guidelines would have to be one of our biggest mistakes ever and we don't believe that decision has improved the environment one iota. It has piled more cost onto the farmer in this production of basic food which is still the backbone of our exports.

Last year our irrigation farmers in the Berriquin Irrigation District which covers a major part of our Shire started the season with an allocation of 11% with a possibility of a little more later, they ended up with somewhere about 30%.

The cruel part was if you had the money it was possible to buy all the water you needed.

How anyone expected our family farmers to produce for export and pay Shire rates on the local front is beyond our comprehension.

Murray Darling Basin is blessed with about some 35,000,000 megalitres of water storages throughout the Basin and all have been filled at some stage throughout the past five (5) years of the Cap. Our farmers have been humbugged about and denied their full allocation at the start of their irrigation season over five years. There is no valid reason why irrigation farmers could not have received their full entitlement at the start of last season 1 September, 1999.

There is no valid reason why an announcement can not be made 1 September 2000 that all farmers within the Murray Valley and Murrumbidgee Valley will get their full allocation for the coming season 2000/2001.

At present Menindee Lakes is full or thereabout and have sufficient water in storage, with a little trickle from the Darling to supply all water below Wentworth. At present the flow in the Murray from Lake Mulwala to anywhere downstream is more than adequate.

Dartmouth is a little over half full and Hume a little under half full and Eucumbene is above target, Lake Eildon in Victoria is low, but last year Victorians got their full entitlement plus some sales. If we get average rains or even a bit less than average I can't see any problem if the job was properly managed.

The problem is water is used as a political football and States differ in their management.

Much of Victoria in the Goulburn Valley has a rainfall average of 18 – 20 inches per annum and if they get a year of average rainfall or better, and it does happen 50% of the time, they would have carryover water so why wouldn't they believe it is a good idea to be able to accumulate that water for next year. It is my belief Victorian carryover water was a fair contribution to Dartmouth and Hume spilling in 1996 and the plug pulled on Hume for safety reasons and a fair sort of a payout going to landowners below Hume for flood damage for which the Murray Darling Basin Commission accepted responsibility.

I believe priorities in water rights should be high priority as it is now for towns and essential industry and permanent crops.

The next would be for the farmers who grow mainly annual crops and when their entitlements are satisfied there could be limited trading in water but I don't believe traded water should hold anything but the lowest levels.

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