

Returning water to Hattah Lakes - EP 1

Brendan Rodgers:

I was born and bred around this area and grew up in this area. Have worked in other locations as well, in Victoria. So, I suppose that when I came back to this area, it was around about that time when we were seeing widespread stress and death of red gums in the park. This is a park that it's built on regular flooding. We're in a semi-arid sort of landscape, so it needs water to survive.

Peter Kelly:

It's that ongoing ability for the lakes to maintain water in a semi-arid landscape, which is, you know, less than 10 in or 300 mm of rainfall. It won't persist those species like Regent Parrots that you can hear it chirping in the background without these lakes in this system.

Brendan Rodgers:

Our most recent flood in 2000, end of 2010 and start of 2011, didn't actually get on to this marker! So water came up to behind pretty much lapping up this big red gum tree, but didn't actually get to this marker so people have an impression that the most recent floods was the panacea, if you like, for the park and this landscape it doesn't actually rate a mention on our large flood marker.

Y'know river regulation has reduced that regular flooding, no doubt about that. It reduced its duration, and it reduced its timing, and reduced its extent. The drought really exacerbated this change of flooding regimes and the landscape started to tell us that that it was sick and tired of it and it couldn't survive without regular flooding.

Ken Stewart:

This place was pretty well barren, middle of drought, not a lot of growth, and I remember one stockholder saying, 'well, if we put water back in here, that's what we need, we need water back in this area, so I can bring my kids out fishing, do the things I did as a child'.

Ben Dyer:

During the Millennium drought, there was no water entered Hattah Lakes, and we started seeing incredible degradations there. We've seen very old red gums dying.

The Mallee CMA works with Parks Victoria, develop the plan to pump water into the lakes.

Brendan Rodgers:

It certainly didn't save every tree and that wasn't the aim, but it was certainly as a bit of a drought refuge to give the landscape some water into it. To give the birds and the animals and frogs and turtles something to cling to before better times arrived.

Ken Stewart:

We're putting some water back in the environmental water and we can see the benefits from the environmental water here now even before the floods come. It makes a difference.

Peter Kelly:

Being able to trial the watering with the environmental watering program that gave us the confidence to know that what we were planning with The Living Murray program was really going to work. We knew that we could get water to these landscapes with pumping infrastructure that was just hired from local contractors but it was equipment that was easily able to be replicated for a more permanent arrangement.

Ben Dyer:

The project is just finishing construction at this stage. So behind me is what we call Messengers regulator. It will spend most of its life open so allowing water to flow from the Murray to the lakes and as Murray flows away the lakes drain back to the Murray. So it's a two-way flow in this creek. So if we don't get the flood or the flood is not long enough or doesn't quite raise the water level high enough, we can close the gates during the flood then turn the pump station on, and extend the duration of flooding or extend the area of flooding. Even though the works will be finished this summer, we won't start using them until next winter. Operation of the works is very much to match the natural cycles.

Brendan Rodgers:

It's a \$30 million once in a life time investment really in the future of this park and we go along in our normal everyday programs with much less money and much less resources than what this has been able to deliver so you know, we're really thankful, really pleased and excited to be looking forward to seeing how this operates and how it delivers into the future.

Sharyon Peart:

It's been a great learning curve in collaboration and working together and engineering and lots and lots of different aspects. This project has brought together state and federal governments from both sides of the river from a state perspective. Also the Murray–Darling Basin Authority,

Catchment Management Authority, Parks Victoria, DSE, Goulburn–Murray Water, council has even been involved in some aspects. There's been lots of different players.

Peter Kelly:

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority and local communities and the state government have put in a lot of time and effort. Been a lot of criticism at times and I think a lot of people misunderstood what was happening in the early stages. To be able to get to a stage now where we can actually demonstrate that there're some real benefits from the Murray–Darling Basin's point of view, from the Victorian government's point of view and that us as a local community are happy to be involved with, I think it's a major change in the way we manage our Murray River and this unique part of the landscape.

For more information go to www.mdba.gov.au

CREDITS

Thank you to the following organisations

Department of Sustainability and Environment

Mallee Catchment Management Authority

Parks Victoria

Goulburn–Murray Water

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Owners, and their Nations, of the Murray–Darling Basin. The MDBA recognises the deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection that Traditional Owners and their Nations have to their lands and waters.

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