

Speak Up Campaign Inc.

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July 24th 2019

Professor Peter Rathjen AO.

Vice-Chancellor and President

University of Adelaide

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vice-chancellor@adelaide.edu.au

Dear Professor Rathjen AO,

On behalf of the organisations listed below I am contacting you regarding our concerns in relation to the governance procedures that the University of Adelaide undertakes when their staff advise government on policy. In addition, we seek clarification on your policies when there are allegations that misleading or false information has been provided to Government.

In particular we refer to the recent claims that a critical report which formed the basis of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan did not reflect previous and subsequent research. In a non-peer reviewed 2009 report (*Fluin et al 2009*¹) by staff from your University to the South Australian Government, it stated: "There is no evidence in the 7000-year record of substantial marine incursions into Lake Alexandrina." We believe this contradicts the peer reviewed 2007 report (*Fluin et al 2007*²) which clearly states there was and would still be (in the absence of barrages) marine influence. Other papers such as *Watching The Tide Roll Away* (*Gell et al 2019*³), and *Modelling Holocene Analogues* paper (Helfensdorfer⁴) also support marine incursion, as well as many other older reports.

¹ Fluin, J., Haynes, D., and Tibby, J. (2009). An environmental history of the Lower Lakes and The Coorong. A report for the Department of Environment and Heritage, South Australia. University of Adelaide, 22 pp. Available at: https://data.environment.sa.gov.au/Content/Publications/CLLMM_218_Environmental%20History%20of%20Lower%20Lakes%20and%20Coorong_2009.pdf

² Fluin, J., Gell, P., Haynes, D., Tibby, J., and Hancock, G. (2007). Palaeolimnological evidence for independent evolution of neighbouring terminal lakes, the Murray Darling Basin, Australia. *Hydrobiologica* 591, 117–134. doi:10.1007/S10750-007-0799-Y

³

https://www.publish.csiro.au/pc/pdf/PC18085?fbclid=IwAR3SGfLZei9WzJk89EHp5RwQfwrULkHCjJgNszt_gh05jm13BdP9xG6bGk

⁴ Helfensdorfer, A.M, Power, H.E, Hubble, T.C.T. (2019). Modelling Holocene analogues of coastal plain estuaries reveals the magnitude of sea-level threat. *Scientific Report*, www.nature.com



We would like to ask: What was the motivation for claims 'there is no evidence in the 7000-year record of substantial marine incursions into Lake Alexandrina', when other reports indicate to the contrary?

Governments, for whatever reason, accepted the false notion that the Lower Lakes had always been fresh. This has had a profound detrimental impact to the environment and communities further upstream on the Murray system who are now wearing the brunt of forcing vast volumes of water to the Lower Lakes based on what we believe was an incorrect report that was not peer-reviewed.

Due to the focus of the MDBP to keep the Lower Lakes fresh water, communities in Northern Victoria and Southern NSW have experienced the following –

- Environmental damage
 - river bank slumping and erosion due to the river being run at above normal heights
 - impacts on native wildlife habitats which rely on the river banks for nesting
 - carp proliferation from increased over bank flows
 - Death of Native Red Gums from increased flooding of forests
- Economic Damage
 - Reduced production of staples such as milk, rice, cereals due to reduced availability of productive water
 - Mass exodus in the dairy industry
 - Huge farm gate losses – Murray Valley \$120 million per annum, Goulburn Valley \$500 million per annum due to MDBP alone
 - Flow on impacts to value adding and service sectors, including massive job losses
- Social Damage
 - Family farmers forced off generational farms
 - Cultural impacts – high job losses for Indigenous community, no compensation
 - Population decline, school number decline, empty shops
 - Huge mental health issues – stress, anxiety, depression and suicide due to unintended consequences of the MDBP

So, we believe the report by staff from your University, which was commissioned by the South Australian Government, has contributed to huge social, economic and environmental damage to other parts of our nation.

In addition to the environmental and social damage being caused upstream of the Lower Lakes, the Lower Lakes themselves are being detrimentally affected because in a freshwater state they host millions of the pest species carp, and the freshwater environment is detrimental to bringing back the critically endangered Murray hardyhead which thrives in brackish water of 12000 EC

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and above. Therefore, the environmental impacts are significant across the entirety of the Murray system.

We would like the following questions answered –

1. Was the University of Adelaide aware of the misleading nature of the report which claimed the Lower Lakes did not have substantial marine incursions? Who funded this report?
2. What process does the University have in place to ensure that reports by staff associated with your university which may form the basis of political advocacy are based on facts and information, not ideology and politics?
3. What steps is the University undertaking to ensure that the facts and correct information are made public to ensure reports which could be considered misleading are rectified?

We believe a report which did not make it clear, despite evidence to the contrary, that the Lower Lakes were once part of an estuarine system has created so much unnecessary hurt, pain and damage, and we believe a clear statement acknowledging the traditional state of the Lower Lakes should be released by the University.

We look forward to your reply.

Kind regards,

Shelley Scoullar

Chair - Speak Up Campaign

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For further background reading please see the link below –

[SA Researchers Changed MDBP Science](#)

Supporting Organisations

Upper Goulburn Catchment Association
Griffith Business Chamber
Edward River Council
Berrigan Shire Council
Murrumbidgee Council
Murray River Council
Murrumbidgee Food and Fibre Association
Creek Country Alliance
Wine Grapes Marketing Board

Murray River Action Group
Southern Riverina Irrigators Inc
Central Murray Floodplains Group Inc
South Australia Fishing Alliance
Deniliquin Business Chamber
Collingullie Water User Group
Murray Valley Private Diversers