

February 1, 2019

South Australia must be part of the solution

Latest issues around the Murray-Darling Basin Plan highlight the need for South Australia to become a more willing participant in finding solutions. It should be supporting infrastructure and water efficiency in its own back yard, instead of ongoing demands to “get every single drop of water that we’re entitled to under the plan”, as stated by SA Premier Steven Marshall. This is the view of the community-based Speak Up Campaign in its response to the South Australian Royal Commission into the Basin Plan.

Speak Up chair Shelley Scoullar said South Australia continues to ignore many fundamental problems which exist.

“In his report, Commissioner Bret Walker SC has recommended a complete overhaul of the plan, but if there is to be an “overhaul” the first place to start is South Australia.

“The key action required to fix many of the Basin Plan’s shortcomings is for the South Australian Government to come on board so they can be addressed.

“At present we have a plan that is decimating rural communities and destroying parts of the Murray River environment. Yet these could be fixed if South Australia had a more proactive approach to finding solutions.

“It seems some people are selective in our environmental objectives. Why is it okay to wreck upstream sections of the Murray River, so the South Australian Lower Lakes are kept at a suitable level for boating and other recreation?

“Why isn’t the SA Government held to account when it holds water in the Lower Lakes for boating, instead of delivering that water into the Coorong, which it says needs protecting?

“And why aren’t we building Lock Zero at Wellington so we can more effectively use limited water supplies?” Mrs Scoullar asked.

She said it was easy for South Australia to continue blaming eastern states for its water problems, but it was past time for responsibility to be shared.

“In recent months we have had water authorities trying to force too much water down the Murray River as they attempt to meet South Australian

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volume obligations, despite local people saying for years these are not physically achievable.

“As a result we have unnatural forest flooding and an explosion of European carp breeding. These carp in turn eat the river’s native vegetation, and coupled with the increased flows this leads to muddy water and river bank erosion.

“So all we are doing is wrecking huge sections of the Murray River from Albury to South Australia; we are sacrificing this environment purely because South Australia will not take responsibility for its end of the system.

“This part of the Basin Plan needs to be fixed,” Mrs Scoullar said.

She added Speak Up was extremely disappointed in suggestions that social and economic factors should not be considered in the Basin Plan’s implementation.

“It used to be considered un-Australian to sacrifice the livelihoods of a fellow group of hard-working Aussies for selfish gain. Are we now stooping so low that this is acceptable?

“From the very start everyone was promised a Basin Plan that delivered for the environment and our rural communities. Surely we have not reached a point where this nation is prepared to sacrifice farmers and the towns that depend on them, purely because one state – South Australia – is not prepared to undertake what should be seen as essential infrastructure works.

“If we head down the path that the Royal Commission suggests, South Australia and the Basin Governments will be responsible for not only the destruction of the nation’s food bowl, but also the Murray River and its natural environment.

“The Basin Plan is not failing because of insufficient water allocated for the environment. It is failing because, as a nation, we haven’t been smart enough to include South Australia in essential infrastructure works that must be undertaken, and we are not making the most of the available resource, whether for environmental or productive use.

“Fix these two problems and we can have a Basin Plan that works for everyone,” Mrs Scoullar said.

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