

Speak Up Campaign Inc.

Inc 1800187

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Dear Neil,

Thanks very much for taking the time to email me on the salt. I agree with you that there was a big salt problem in Northern Victoria and the NSW Murray about 30-40 years ago. The problem I see is that the report from 1999 is outdated. That report had no way of taking into account the improvements made from the Land and Water Management Plans, salt dilution and additional dilution flows, along with the salt interception schemes, which all have assisted in reducing the amount of salt which enters the river. Since that report water has also been recovered through other water reforms including the Living Murray, which again would impact on the accuracy of a report produced before that time. You have acknowledged that these (2 of them non-flow measures) have helped to reduce the amount of salt that needs to be flushed from the system.

The average estimated salt export (according to the MDBA reports) at the barrages from 2012 – 2015 was 0.9 million tonnes and from 2014 – 2017 was 0.87 million tonnes per year, compared to Murray Bridge which was an average of 0.77 tonnes per year 2012 – 2015 and 0.75 tonnes 2014 - 2017. The salt load at Lock 6 for these periods were 0.5 tonnes 2012 -2015 and 0.56 tonnes average 2014-2017, while for Euston averaged 0.3 tonnes and 0.42tonnes 2014-2017. The highest has been in 2016/2017 (1.84 million tonnes Barrages, 1.38 Murray Bridge, 1.1 Lock 6 and 0.82 at Euston). This shows that the current salinity levels in the Murray outside very wet years are considerably low and it is during high rainfall and flood years that salt is mobilised as you would expect. You would recall that this was a very wet year, one of the biggest floods in living memory in parts, so it would stand to reason that large amounts of salt would be exported off the flood plains and wetlands during this time. This was a natural event, CEWH water was not required to achieve this outcome. With the decrease in irrigation and the increase in environmental watering how much of this salt was the result of food and fibre production and how much was due to environmental watering? You will note that years of lower rainfall has seen a significantly reduced amount of salt exported, as it was not flushed into the system. So, do we really need all that water in an environmental account to export salt or can nature do this on her own?

I would also like to know whether the salt interception scheme was running during the high flow periods, especially the 2016 floods, as I heard that they had been switched off in late 2015 / early 2016, this would have surely impacted on the salt to be exported.

There is a significant difference in the amount of salt exported at Murray Bridge and the Barrages, we really need to acknowledge that the requirement for large environmental flows to export salt from the Lower Lakes could be reduced if flows were returned via the south east drainage scheme via the southern Coorong, returning both to their natural state. Other sources that add salt to the Lower Lakes besides the Murray may include ground water from around the Lower Lakes and sea water when barrages open or leak on a high tide with a south westerly blowing or the fish slots in the barrages. Factors which upstream communities are expected to combat, if the Lower Lakes were

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returned to an estuarine system or the construction of Lock 0 was investigated, the salt argument would collapse.

Data from the Dept. of Environment, Water and Natural Resources ([Barrage flows v's Lake Salinity](#)) clearly show that the EC target of the Lower Lakes (measured at Milang) has been well and truly met since the conclusion of the millennium drought, and clearly shows that the salt export out of the Lower Lakes on average is below well below 1 million tonnes. So do we really need an extra 450GL to meet that salt export target if it is already been met with the water already acquired?

Surely the real questions we must consider is: what were the long term historical figures, what are the ecological consequences of exporting 1 million tonnes of salt? And what is my burning question, surely in this day and age with all the technology, information and scientists at our finger tips we should have a more updated report than one that is nearly 20 years old? Surely, we have other methods that can help solve this salt issue than just adding water?

We have the same amount of entitlements, just going to different places, so why are we spending \$13 billion of taxpayer's money to destroy our prime food producing regions when less could be spent with the same outcome and protecting our communities? The legislated commitment is to deliver a Basin Plan without negative social and economic consequences to Basin Communities, as MDBA and independent reports continue to show this is not happening.

I understand your concerns about misreporting, we have also been on the receiving end of inaccurate or should I say selective reporting by a clever ABC journalists with a specific agenda.

I am glad you got onto John, as I think he is about to head out of the country to help other nations bring communities on the journey of integrated river management. Communities owning the solutions and producing balanced outcomes that support social wellbeing, economic stability and ecological health. Unfortunately (as was highlighted on 7.30 Report 14th June) we often do not treat scientists who offer alternative solutions very well.

Speak Up will continue to highlight these issues on behalf of our communities for a better Basin Plan that protects both the environment and our communities. I look forward to continuing to work with the MDBA to achieve this lofty goal.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shelley Scoullar".

Shelley Scoullar
On Behalf
Speak Up Campaign