

Speak Up Campaign Inc.

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Mr Phillip Glyde
CEO Murray Darling Basin Authority
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December 16, 2020

Dear Mr Glyde,

On behalf of the Speak Up Campaign I would like to address some concerns in your recent - **Why is erosion occurring in the River Murray and particularly through the Barmah Choke?**

In the publication irrigation flows are cited as one of the reasons the Murray River is run at a consistently high level during summer, therefore not providing an opportunity for the river to dry out during winter when there are high environmental flows.

We agree that unregulated downstream developments, the decoupling of water from land and the current water market have allowed water to flow from upstream storages to downstream permanent plantings and this has significantly changed the flow regime of the Murray River.

However, this is not the only reason for the additional flow pressures on the Barmah Choke. We believe it is important that the MDBA, as the 'go to' organisation on the Murray River and the Murray Darling Basin Plan avoids a blanket approach to irrigation when allotting 'blame' for issues that are occurring. For example, it is certainly not dairy, rice, cereal, fodder, lamb or beef producers in the NSW Murray who are placing high summer demands on the Barmah choke, resulting in the bank erosion.

As the independent authority, it is extremely important you are educating the wider public and ensuring the public and our politicians understand the type of irrigation and region which is placing the increased demand on the system. We also need clarity around the impact of Choke trading rules.

While the erosion of the Murray is the most publicly acknowledged, the Edward and Goulburn Rivers are also experiencing similar devastating erosion as the Murray, and as they are above the choke are not included in the choke trading rules. As such we believe it is extremely important that the Millewa Choke be accepted as a point in the river where capacity constraints are recognised. This narrow section of the river is where two major offtakes are located, along with regulators which send water into the adjoining forest.

Diverting water through the forest and via the Edward and Gulpa offtakes merely transfers the pressure further downstream. This is especially true for the section of Murray between Echuca and Barham. Locals between Echuca and Barham are recording vast amounts of

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erosion along the Murray near Barham and through Gunbower. As you are aware the Goulburn River enters the Murray above Echuca, and again these flows need to be taken into account when causes of downstream river bank erosion are being considered. The section of river near Barham is not subject to high speed boat activity, which is cited in your publication as another contributor to erosion.

The publication states that the Barmah Choke rule has not been breached and that the movement of licences to the environmental account has reduced the pressure on the choke. It seems rather contradictory that irrigation is cited as the reason for the increased erosion, yet there has been no breach in trade rules. We all know that permanent plantings have placed unprecedented pressure on river capacity, so how have trade rules not been broken?

Can you please provide us with;

- The types of water which are subject to Barmah choke trade rules
- How the volumes of water are measured
- Whether there needs to be trade rules on the Goulburn developed to protect the Murray River downstream of the Barmah Choke
- Volumes of water transferred from above the choke to below the choke from October to March for the last 15 years,
- Flows entering and discharging from the Edward River for the same time period,
- Flows discharging from the Goulburn River into the Murray for the same period
- Flows discharged from Torrumbarry weir
- Flows past Swan Hill for the same period

We believe it is important to start seriously acknowledging the erosion and environmental degradation being caused to the Murray and other rivers from a range of factors, which may include transfer of irrigation water downstream, but will also possibly include the movement of environmental water to achieve flow targets to SA, as well as possible damage from recreational water vessels.

We do not believe it is appropriate to lump the blame on 'irrigators', many of whom have had their businesses and livelihoods severely impacted by the Basin Plan.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Lachlan Marshall

Chair – Speak Up Campaign

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