

Speak Up Chair Report 24/03/2023

Thank you all for joining us at Speak Up's 2022-23 AGM.

I would like to begin by thanking the committee for taking on their roles. Things happen quickly in water and at times decisions need to be made on the spot; your trust in my leadership and direction is sincerely appreciated, without you there would be no Speak Up.

A big thanks must go to our secretary and treasurer Sue Braybon, for keeping me organised and doing all the jobs she does to allow me to spend time making phone calls and networking.

There are many sounding boards who I won't name, but I am very grateful for your time and passion as we work to deliver a fair go for our region. Lloyd, thank you for always being there in an emergency to collaborate with, your energy and drive to keep people informed is contagious. I know we are both on the same page and thank you for taking on the responsibility of deputy chair so we can keep on a roll!

2022 started off a bit slower than usual, with a drop in revenue and little happening in the water space we pulled back on our media work. But it has been full steam ahead since Tanya Plibersek filled the position of Water Minister.

Despite my best efforts to step back a little from water advocacy, the concern felt by many in the water policy space has become evident with an increased desire to collaborate with Speak Up.

To be honest, six months ago I wasn't sure if there was still a role for Speak Up, but the last 2 months have certainly provided many examples of why our presence is still needed to be a voice for the grassroots.

And the fiasco of the information events on the Strategic Water Purchasing Framework has made me want to fight harder than ever to ensure our rural communities are treated with respect and dignity. Despite now living in a rural city, my passion for the people and communities who make up our food producing regions has strengthened.

Over the last year we have published numerous media releases, for ourselves and other organisations in the water space, particularly Murray Regional Strategy Group. We have distributed letters to the editor on behalf of members, and supported those who need help raising their concerns about water issues. We have also written to Ministers about promises on the 450GL, carp proliferation and environmental water management and reminded Ministers about their legislative promises on water buybacks. To say that the responses have been underwhelming is an understatement.

We also contacted every candidate in the seats of Farrer, Nicholls and Mallee seeking their position on irrigated agriculture and water for the Federal election.

As we move into the messy and pointy end of Basin Plan implementation, our Governments, in particular the Albanese Government, are determined to forge ahead with a plan which was never going to work. Our rivers have never been in a worse state of health, however, this has given us an opportunity to engage with people who in the past have been oblivious to the problems.

This is why we have decided to start Live Streaming on a regular basis to hopefully engage with a new set of people, who may help us with this battle.

There is still a tough road ahead, but my hope is that the time is very close when all organisations involved in the water space work closely and more collaboratively.

On a final note, a big thank you to our members who keep believing in the work we do and funding this operation! Speak Up began in the middle of 2015, we have jammed a lot into that 8 years, and I thank you for your ongoing belief and support for our work.

And lastly our media advisor Garry, thank you for working with me for the last 8 years, we have had some amazing adventures, we make a great team and I sincerely thank you for going above and beyond what you are contracted to do. You are as equally passionate about advocacy for our region and the wealth of knowledge and experience in our local communities which goes unrecognised by those in glass towers and concrete buildings.

Shelley Scoullar
Speak Up – Chair