

Speak Up Chair Report 13/02/2022

Hello and welcome to the Speak Up AGM, I sincerely thank you all for taking the time to attend, especially on a Sunday, I know we all have increasing commitments in our lives.

It has been an honour to Chair Speak Up over the last 15 months, it has certainly brought about experiences, meetings and opportunities which I had not expected when I took on the role.

Over the past 2 years the role of Speak Up has changed, partly due to COVID, partly due to improved advocacy from other organisations within our foot print and also due to the changes in rainfall over the last two years.

Speak Up have been instrumental in establishing and fostering the relationships which have cemented Murray Regional Strategy Group as the go to organisation on water policy issues in the mid-Murray. Last year MRSRG hosted the first ever workshop, which included representatives from NSW DPIE, Murray Darling Basin Authority, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, Department Ag Water and Environment, along with regional representatives, this took place in Deniliquin. A follow up workshop took place over Zoom in October and a third is planned to take place later this month.

Both Federal and State water ministers and local representatives have called for a united voice on water issues, this could not have happened without the formation and leadership of MRSRG. As a result Speak Up have put a lot of energy into this process, which earlier this month resulted in state funding for a community driven monitoring project, this project was driven by MRSRG during high flow events from July to September, and involved locals monitoring third party impacts. A report collated by a local ecologist was presented to a variety of bureaucrats and local water groups late last year.

Along with supporting MRSRG, we have continued to highlight issues through media outlets and supported those wanting to voice their concerns through letters and opinion pieces. And in particular I want to thank our deputy chair Lloyd Polkinghorne for his incredible efforts to highlight the horrendous damage being caused to our river banks.

I would like to say a big thank you to all our members, whichever level of membership you have subscribed to. Without your financial contributions we would not be able to keep our issues in the media and on politicians radars. We know they read regional papers and that what is printed gets noticed.

This year due to falling finances through less membership we have had to reduce our media coverage. Despite this, I have to make special comment about our media advisor Garry

Baker, who goes above and beyond in his role to advocate for our regional communities. His knowledge of media, politics and how to get a point across is second to none and we are so lucky to have his (very cheap) services in our blight for common sense in water policy. Thank you Garry.

I would like to sincerely thank all the committee who are there when we need to pick their brains, or attend a meeting if need be. To Sue Braybon who has undertaken the role of treasurer and secretary this year, and has provide Shelley with additional support.

And of course a big thank you to my partner in crime Shelley, who has tried to sneak away from water – but thankfully is always there when we need her.

On a personal note, as many of you will be aware I will be needing to vacate the Chair role at this AGM due to my position on the Murray Irrigation Board which began in November. When taking on the role of Speak Up chair this was not on the horizon, however after much consultation and deliberation it was agreed that unless there could be a significant change in direction from the biggest privately owned water delivery operator in the country then the efforts of Speak Up would be hopeless. I hope to keep a position on the committee as I believe there is still a role for Speak Up moving forward.

With that I would like to thank you all for believing in the power of communities and having hope for a brighter future.

Lachlan Marshall
Speak Up - Chair