

DARLING RIVER.
HISTORICAL LETTERS
TO BARRIER DAILY TRUTH
2003 TO 2018.

For Your Information 23rd May 2018

Please find enclosed a series of personal letters I have written over the past 15 years to the local newspaper, the Barrier Daily Truth.

I was one of the founding members of the Darling River Action Group (hereafter referred to as DRAG) in March 2004 when Broken Hill was having serious issues with water quality from the Darling River and the push to pipe the Great Ana Branch of the Darling River, which eventually happened.

As you can see this has, and still is an ongoing problem that no Government seems to be able to address. This is mainly caused (I believe) because Governments change so often and we have to start all over again. We just seem to go in circles with no resolution to this long time water problem that is just getting worse.

DRAG has sat down with Politicians from all parties. Eg: Mark Vale and the Nationals, Penny Wong from Labour, Nick Xenophon along with all water Bureaucrats and Irrigators with no outcomes.

The time has arrived for the Darling River & the Menindee Lakes Storage System to be respected for what it is. The life blood for the Far West, and the communities along this once healthy river system.

I thank you for your efforts, and hope we can at last see some good results.

Kind regards
Marie Wecker

PS: I would appreciate acknowledgement of this folder being read and shared with the appropriate persons.

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WATER WONDERLAND 12th June 2003

It seems that some interesting ideas were put forward at the recent "Round Table" on water & it's future, and these good ideas are not to be ignored, but neither should the difficult questions that need to be asked.

Eg. Is the Murray/Darling river system being overused?

What will be our water quality in the future? This will be a hard one to answer.

Are our local water storage reservoirs to be desilted and upgraded?

Great news that Broken Hill is to become more water efficient. What about the irrigators?

As we become more water efficient will Australian Inland then increase prices to keep their revenue at the same level?

If our water is to continue being supplied via the Darling river, then the quality must be guaranteed.

We were told that Copi Hollow held enough water to supply Broken Hill to the end of 2003. I now believe that the water in Copi is not fit even to shower in, and I find this very worrying. Water quality must be of prime importance.

We have seen SA impose a \$30 tax on its people without detail of how they intend to tackle the remediation of the Murray River.

NB. 3700 SA irrigators along the Murray will not be paying the levee.

While there are things that can be done to improve the usage of water in Broken Hill, we would be remiss not to tackle the important big issues.

With SA demanding an increase in the environmental flow, I ask "where will they come from?" The Darling or the Upper Murray? These issues are a real concern for Broken Hill's water supply.

Buckets of money cannot fix the rivers, but action can.

Lastly, pray for rain. Without it we will be in the proverbial this coming summer.

Rattle the Buckets.

MJ Wecker.

Letter to the Editor.

Need not Greed.

060404

letter again tries to paint Broken Hill's population as the greedy, wanting all the water. We know we do not own the water, and do not want it all, but having a clean palatable and safe water supply is paramount.

You tell us about the worst drought in 100 years, but what about the huge growth in irrigation in the past 20 years. When one irrigator can hold enough water to supply Broken Hill (at today's usage) for 75 years, one can see clearly who are the greedy.

has done as I stated in my last letter, cried "what about the towns upstream?". Well Broken Hill had to adjust when the mining industry closed and so will those towns when they are asked to adjust to less water for their irrigation so the rivers can remain healthy and all can rely on good water.

While driving from Adelaide to Mildura last weekend I was appalled at the wasteful use of overhead sprayers, not only watering vines, but also the roads, and pictures are attached to this letter to confirm this.

Mismanagement and greed are killing the inland rivers, and can put forward any argument he likes, but he will not change our minds on who are killing the rivers.

Thanking those who are duly paid for their work is also another insult. How about thanking the people of Broken Hill for acting in a dignified manner during the water crisis even though they were coping with 3rd world undrinkable water that was killing our gardens and damaging their property.

Get the priorities right

Broken Hill deserves better.

Marie Wecker

Letter to the Editor. 25/1/2004.

Piping the Great Annabranh.

Sir,

We read Mr. P. Burton's letter -, re: this pipeline proposal.

It was pleasing to see someone from the pro piping put their views across.

For some time we have felt that this proposal was not getting the debate it is entitled to, and we believe the Government has not taken both sides of the argument into account, preferring to ignore the views of those against this proposal.

Mr. Burton's letter was well written from his point of view, and while it has done nothing at all to change our view on this matter, it has at least put opinions forward for all people to consider.

This will never get full backing from either side, and despite Mr. Burton's letter from his personal point of view, we still strongly oppose this as there are still too many questions unanswered.

A few to point: What do they call an environmental flow? How often will this occur and how much will be let go?

Our concerns for the wildlife and native trees still stands. In particular the gums.

Healthy debate is good, but endeavouring to push this through without debate does nothing to appease those who feel their opinions don't count.

What is does, as in this case, give people room to believe this is all about irrigators and selling our water to the highest bidder, something Mr. Burton's letter hasn't help alleviate.

Marie Wecker

MURRAY DARLING BASIN 22.8.205

We are DRAG (Darling River Action Group) and are based in Broken Hill, a city which relies heavily on the Darling River (or as we call it "sewer") for our water supply.

While people and groups speak of the Murray/Darling, only the Murray River seems to get the attention whilst the Darling is being ruined, or is ruined by over use eg Cotton. We as a group take the concerns to the NSW Govt and Federal but seem not to be able to get much done.

The "CAP" on the Darling is supposed to help but there is so much opposition from the irrigators and they have plenty of pull.

We are not seeing floods flow the full length of the river and the "Trigger Points" are able to be manipulated when pressure is applied.

The Great Ana Branch of the Darling River has completely dried and only at time of flood will it see water. The problem is that the irrigation has grown to a point where the flood will have to be huge for this important part of the river system to see water again.

There is supposed to be a "Water Sharing Plan" to be drawn up but meeting for this are held in Moree 1700km from the lower Darling and in an area heavily laden with irrigators. We town people and lower Darling resident don't stand a chance in this arena. We (DRAG) intend to send a few people to the Moree Forum but have been warned to be careful. We are not sure what that means.

To hear that GreenPeace is look at the Murray/Darling Basin gives us great heart, but we ask that you also look closely at the unsustainable pressure being place on this fragile river.

We are given great coverage by the local ABC Radio and the Broken Hill news paper print all our letters and items.

We have extended our group to Wilcannia & Menindee trying to gain strength. Wilcannia possibly suffers the most as they have seen the river devastated by over use and drought. This is only to get worse as climate change is coming on at such a pace. Living in such a marginal area makes you so aware of the importance of being water wise, but these huge growers only seem to see profits.

We have seen dreadful fish kills. Huge Cod killed by rotten and polluted water and mismanagement you have to see to believe.

Please take a good look at the Darling River too late.

We wish you good luck in your efforts in the Murray/Darling Basin.

Good Luck – DRAG

Contacts

Marie Wecker

OUR DARLING ANA BRANCH.

11th September 2005

The Land – May 27th 1993. The Darling River, Australia's longest waterway, and the life blood of NSW pastoral zone, is under siege. Demands on its all-too-scarce waters from competing user groups have reached a point where the system is not longer able to cope, and while claim and counter claim are traded across boundary fences and state borders, the riparian environment pays the price. As written by Andrew Martin.

Well, it appears to finally have happened. The NSW Govt is to spend \$50 million plus on piping the Great Ana Branch of the Darling River. Landholders will be guaranteed a water supply, and this is good, but what about the environment.

We are told the water savings will be 47gigs and that this will benefit Broken Hill and the environment. The Ana Branch is dry, and as for the promises of an "environmental flow" every three years. "Pigs may Fly". In Victoria water is being trucked to Ana branches to save the Red River Gums.

The Lower Darling River is in a state of constant drought, not of the natural kind, but manmade. I'm told there are pictures of camels walking the dusty river bed of the Darling, but that was in the days of natural drought and flood, before regulation when the rivers flowed freely and dried. We can't return to those times, but that is what is expected of the Great Ana Branch. No water will flow down the Ana Branch unless it is via a huge flood, which is unlikely with so much water being extracted upstream.

If this constant over use of the Darling continues. Or even worse, more development takes place, the sight of a dry river bed could be more prevalent.

We have stood back and allowed untruths to prevail and the state of our rivers and associated creeks and billabongs has worsened, and all Govts do nothing.

Rest in Peace Our Darling Ana Branch.

MJ Wecker,

30th July 2006.

Letter to the Editor.

Here we go again, the Menindee Lakes coming under attack by those wanting more water in their area.

All Governments have had the opportunity to place the weir between Lakes Menindee & Cawndilla whilst they are dry, but again they are sitting on their hands and not tackling the problem of evaporation with these two lakes when they have water in them. They have been dry for a few years now.

The people of Broken Hill do not want to read about vague, esoteric proposals for their water supply. Eg. Mine Shafts & Aquifers. Lets drill down to specifics, and let us really know what plans are on the table.

Some time ago the people of Broken Hill voted for their reservoirs to be cleaned and upgraded, but this fell on deaf ears or was considered the wrong way to go. Instead we hear that "maybe" we could get our supply from the Murray. This is really a case of "going round in circles". Water passes Menindee, then pumped back to Broken Hill from Wentworth. This plan – "to free up the Menindee Lakes". What does that mean?

We are seeing \$55 million being spent on the Ana Branch Pipeline which was to save 47 gig per year. Where did that water go, or is it still upstream in irrigation dams?

Mr. MacDonald will have to do a lot of work regarding environmental flows. The Ana Branch is supposed to receive such flows, but I wonder when.

The LMDCMA, Western & CMA's must keep the people of Broken Hill fully informed on all matters and proposals relating to the Darling River and our water supply. Meetings must be open and at convenient times so the interested can attend. The health of the Darling River is of paramount importance to us and we must be kept well informed.

M. Wecker,

Broken Hill.

Please note the date of this letter. Same old story over & over.

I also think that paragraph three shows that the aquifer plan has been around for some time & we are still in the dark. 12/08/10

NB. Original date, last please note date & todays date. 10/03/13.

Feels like "deja-vu" - illusionary feeling of having already experienced a present situation. Something tediously familiar. (Oxford Dictionary)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR. 27 Jan 2007

John Howard's Ten Billion Dollar plan for the Murray/Darling Basin was pleasing news that was long overdue.

In reality, we will only know what is happening when all proposals are released in full detail.

Our real concern is what is in store for the Menindee Lakes and Broken Hill's water supply. The notion that the Menindee Dams are man made is wrong as all lakes except Copi Hollow and Wetheral are natural, and were originally named "Laidley's Ponds" in 1831 by Major Mitchell. They were enhanced by man to provide a secure water supply to the lower Darling and Lower Murray. Mr. Grabbe of Cubbie has stated that the real problem is the Menindee Lakes in "The Land" 27th May 1993 and we hope the Lakes developments are not driven by irrigators. We must have community consultation, and we urged this when meeting with Mark Vale.

At the meeting with the Deputy Premier we also brought his attention to the problems with the Warrego, the proposed auction of its water, and also the blocking of the flow to the Darling.

We would be asking for 100% of water savings to be returned to the Darling first up, with perhaps some windback when rivers are restored to a healthy flow, and the problem of over allocation is dealt with successfully. The rivers need full attention, not just token flows. DRAG will be watching all developments with interest.

Our next meeting will be Tuesday 30th January at Community Inc Beryl Street at 7pm, with Brian Steffan of Country Water being the Guest Speaker.

Winner of the Bronwyn Woodroffe picture drawn by Gus Mersey was J. Erskine.

Marie Wecker
DRAG

9th March 2008.

Action on the Darling.

The Darling & Murray River problems are still the main news, and with \$50 million dollars made available by the Federal Labour Party, one would think there is movement on water overallocation. In truth, this amount "may" return around 25 gig to the river, but we are aware that for years it has been called for 500gig to be returned to just assist the Murray River.

The buying back of licences is a positive move, but we must be careful that the only people to sell will be those already suffering badly because of low flows. These are the people suffering from overallocation throughout the whole Murray/Darling system, and particularly on the QLD & NSW border. The size, and amount of water these places use is having a huge impact on the lower river systems and must be addressed, not just buying the licences of people hitting the wall. Perhaps we should move away from criticizing the type of crops grown, but focus on the amount of water being taken and the fact that this cannot be maintained. Water must be returned to the river systems to maintain the rivers ecology and health right through to the end of the system. Only then can the rivers health be recovers, and irrigation be retained at a sustainable level.

argument recently that the people on the Great Ana Branch of the Darling River don't want a flow anymore now that they have a pipeline is an example of true arrogance. The people may not want it, but the environment is screaming for it. This total ignorance of the benefit of a healthy environment should not be tolerated.

The Darling River Action Group in 2007 has had a successful year with the action on the Warrego River and through the media and mail outs emphasising the problems of the Darling River and all river wetlands to the people best able to address the problems. In 2008 we want to see action. The time for all the Bureaucrats just talking and having study after study must come to an end and the hard work started to address overallocation of all our rivers. QLD & NSW border irrigators must realise the effect their operations has on the entire Murray/Darling basin, and be part of an equitable solution. The small operator on the lower rivers must not be the victim while large companies continue on their merry way. Health at the Murray mouth will mean the rest of the rivers are OK.

DRAG has just completed the updating of its information book and copies will be sent to all media and Government bodies addressing the state of the Darling River and offering solutions.

Come along and help DRAG telling the other side of the story of our rivers and wetlands. You really can make a difference.

Marie Wecker

Letter to the Editor.

Once in a Blue Moon. 18th Feb 2010

We are now seeing the fruits of a once in a 10 year flood filling our Darling River, spilling over on to the flood plains nourishing our parched land. To see the river at full head, and people along this river enjoying the available water with the Darling Dash held last Saturday shows the social benefits of a healthy river cannot be ignored. The inflow of people visiting Menindee must be lifting their economy and so many from Broken Hill are once again travelling to fish and enjoy this flood event

We have seen well over the 148gig level allowed to flow to the lower Darling, Murray and lower Lakes in SA, and now many are wondering if the Ana Branch is getting one of its promised every three year environmental flows, and why Lakes Menindee & Cawandilla are not being used as storage for the lower river and SA. This is a once in a 10 year flood, and one would presume that storing water for release as needed would be a wise move. We hear about the shifting of control from NSW to Murray Darling Commission once the lakes reach 640gig, and we cannot let this happen, so we release all the water down the river to evaporate elsewhere. Is there an unknown issue with the Menindee & Cawndilla Lakes, or is the refusal to charge these lakes political?

The time has arrived for our Political, Civic Leaders, CMA's along with the appropriate Govt bodies to explain why they refuse to store water for use in these lakes in this very special flood event. These once natural lakes deserve their flood during these "Once in a Blue Moon" times.

The rumours are running rife. Eg. The gates on the Menindee Lake are welded closed, there is a levee across the inlet stopping the water from the high river flowing down the Ana Branch, there is brown coal in Menindee Lake, there are grazing rights on Menindee lake etc. All these rumours are harmful, and the truth should be readily available to the people affected by the way the lakes are controlled. On a personal level, I have received mixed stories from a CMA member, so how is the layperson expected to understand. I am informed that no water will enter Menindee or Cawandilla until the channel is allowed, from Cawndilla to the river so that residual pools can be drained. I am still confused as to why you would not store 600gig of more, just because leftover pools can't be drained. Residual pools are where the fish population survive during dry times.

Wise people save for the future, and so should those in control of our most precious resource. This is a rare event and should be used to keep a steady flow down river, not just total waste because of an aversion to Lakes Menindee & Cawndilla. Governments have wasted million of dollars on consultant and surveys on the lakes system instead of maintaining the infrastructure to work efficiently when these "Once in a Blue Moon" events occur.

Clear and honest information must flow to the public during these times. Everyone was happy to see water flow south to replenish the lower lakes, but now its time to nourish the Menindee Lower Lakes and the Great Ana Branch of the Darling River.

We live in hope.

Marie Wecker

Letter to the Editor. 2.3.2010.

The explanation as to why no water is to be stored in Lakes Menindee & Cawndilla is lame to say the least, instead double of the amount we were told was to be released has travelled south to an already full Murray River as seen in recent pictures of the Murray River at Renmark. That additional water could have well prepared the above lakes for future flows that could be stored for the future. I cannot understand why people in SA do not realise that Lakes Menindee & Cawndilla are storages for them.

Menindee Lakes Storage Scheme

Also known as Laidley's Ponds 21.11.14

Mayor Wincen Cuy has asked me to express to this meeting the impact the Menindee Lakes Storage Scheme had on Broken Hill & Menindee when finished back in 1960. A secure water supply, no more water trains, ability to green the city and control lead dust, make this a better place for the hard working miners and their families. It was a great place to take family and friends to sail, ski, fish and just enjoy the water. Our family skied every summer from 1977 through to the mid 90's when they moved with their employment. Menindee had people using their stores, tourists driving their economy, and many people invested in holiday homes at Copi Hollow & Menindee Lakes, along with vibrant caravan parks. This is a very important place to all, full of fond times.

I would like to now comment on the events over the past 15 years and the backlash and anger it has caused.

Back in 2003-2004 the lakes were drained and Broken Hill was left with very little water, that was undrinkable, and also damaged HWS, ACs, washing machines etc. The lakes then remained empty for 10 years. No evaporation in that time. Now in 2014 going into 2015 we are faced with the same scenario due to the draining of the Menindee Lakes Storage Scheme.

Let me explain the anger. This water was let go into a bulging Murray River, running out to sea. Why? Because they were entitled to that water. This wording should be changed to "when needed". We were and are aware of the commitments to the Lower Darling and Murray and realise the water is not just stored for Broken Hill, but of late our lakes are dry too often.

We are now to go on water restriction to save water. If we do not use it, will it not evaporate? (as we are always told). If we are to accept this theory, surely we must use this last bit of water before it does evaporates.

Solutions: There are various solutions, but in the past 15 years consultants are the only ones to have profited, and no restructure of the Storage Lakes has taken place. This upsets those who love and rely on the river and lakes. So many promises with absolutely no action. I was a founding member of DRAG and we worked in a non political manner trying to offer solutions to fix this issue, but now they have a Facebook group who are stronger in their views, and as has been said to me, DRAG was not radical enough.

PTD

I live in hope that if this present Govt. is re elected we will see measures being taken to make the Menindee Lakes Storage Scheme more efficient, so all can benefit from this wonderful area. Much needed not just only by people, but by so much wildlife that rely on the lakes. They are a storage scheme, not great evaporation ponds as depicted by some.

This latest action taken at the lakes has angered many and has had an awful effect on Broken Hill & Menindee residents along with Wilcannia continually looking at a dry river. Not only have we lost the water, but we now have to endure Jeremy Thank you so much.

Finally, I have been asked to ask Kevin what discussions did you have with the irrigators you took to Menindee. People want to know.

I want to see the Liberal/Nationals stay in power, and I certainly do not want a feckless Labor/Green Coalition in this area.

Finally, please come up with some engineering works that will improve the storage. Put down a timeline when and what the improvements will be. We do not want to be in this situation in ten years time. People are angry, and want to see action. No more consultants.

Marie Wecker

Darling Disgrace.

Amended Letter to the Editor. 22/10/14

The damage being done to the Darling River from Bourke to Wentworth is nothing short of environmental vandalism. They were not happy for water to be released when needed. No they wanted their entitlement (hate that word) all at once with total disregard for those living on the Darling River. Louth, Tilpa, Wilcannia, Menindee, Pooncarie, the landowners along the pipeline, this is their lifeline. This horror story is not just about the lakes, it's about total mismanagement of this vital system serving a very large part of Western NSW.

To the people now taking on the responsibility of this fight, we need a huge public meeting with Govt officials. The minister of Agriculture, Barnaby Joyce is talking of building new water storages, creating "Water Banks". Empty banks are of no use to anyone. The way storages are managed need a great deal more work and understanding of natural water ways. The ignorance and disrespect for those on the and Broken Hill water supply is a real concern. We should not be working out a way to release water faster from the lakes, but how to preserve this precious resource for when it's needed, not totally wasted as seen recently, and please do not throw the "Evaporation Story" at us. I am old enough to remember going fishing at any time with the river always having water. Levels may have changed, but it always had water. It is only in the last ten years that we have seen this river bone dry with trees growing in the dry river bed. How things have changed.

A meeting with State & Federal Ministers of Agriculture, Environment & Water would be appropriate, especially Agriculture, as we all know the interest shown by the irrigators.

Time for Council along with all bodies with the responsibility of our welfare to stand tall and defend our fresh water supply. We will not accept bore water and with lead problems "water Restrictions" are dirty words.

I believe that a Facebook site has thousands of members. Great news. If a public meeting is arranged we all need to be seen on mass.

Marie Wecker

Who controls the Murray Darling Basin 9th May2018.

The changes in the administration of the Murray Darling Basin over the past 20 years is appalling.

We have a situation where the Darling River & tributaries outcomes are driven by the powerful irrigation lobby, facilitated by the water bureaucrats and endorsed by successive feckless governments. There is no fair outcome with authoritarian regimes.

The MDB was once the "Food Bowl of Australia, then became the "Food & Fibre Bowl" and now perhaps should be renamed "The Fibre Bowl"

Remember when Menindee had the first juicy apricots of the season along with wonderful grapes and other produce? This town is now just a small town on a dying river thanks to greed, and may I say alleged corruption. Why is it so great to put 605gig of environmental water back to the irrigation industry to create security on the small towns upstream whilst at the same time destroying a small town like Menindee?

Remember the Great Ana Branch of the Darling River? Once a place for fish, yabbies and wonderful birdlife. I recall a story many years ago when Neville Wran was interested in piping the Ana Branch. He sent his men out to catch him a feed of Yabbies and when they returned with a bag full was told by the property owner that "you can't catch yabbies in a pipeline." The piping of the Ana Branch was step one in the reduction of storage in the Menindee Lakes.

There is not one political party that can claim the higher moral ground in the state of the Darling & Lower Darling river. The destruction is enormous, and now we see the two main parties coming together agreeing to take 605gig away from the environment and given to irrigation industry that has been accused of taking billions of litres of water illegally. Where are the compliance rules. No meter, no pumping should be the order of the day. I wonder why a previous chairman of the MDBA is overseeing the illegal taking of water and compliance. Where is the independence in this.

We now have come to a point where they can't blame evaporation as water can't evaporate from empty lakes and rivers, but can from huge irrigation dams. Over allocation is now at the point of destroying the Darling environment unless the Government of the day retake control from the irrigation lobby. Irrigation of opportunistic crops has a very low priority and the time has arrived to place people, stock and domestic and the environment back above cotton.

We have watch and fought the deterioration of our Darling River. The state of the Darling River is not an issue to play political football with. There is a severe problem and can only be resolved by genuine concern and a will to do so.

Marie Wecker