

The Lower Murray Lakes and Coorong Ecological Crisis

Recommendations from the South Australian Environment Movement



The River Murray is much more than a source of water for Australia's food bowl, more than money in the pockets of our primary producers, more than a home for unique Australian plants, animals and migratory birds from around the world.

The Murray is Australia's great river system; it has a central place in our national identity and heritage. The Lower Lakes and Coorong is its estuary, a wetland of international significance.

It is not possible to save the River while letting its estuary die.

Australians will not accept the death of the Murray, and South Australians will not accept the sacrifice of the Lower Lakes and Coorong.

The Federal Government must act now!

We recommend the following action:

- * That a guaranteed annual environmental water entitlement be purchased for the Lower Murray Lakes and Coorong and released into the Ramsar site immediately. The size of this entitlement needs to be based on credible science to maintain the ecological health, function and integrity of the Ramsar site.

It is recognised that flows across the barrages of about 2 gigalitres per day would be successful in reducing the risks of mouth closure ⁽¹⁾. This equates to about 730 gigalitres per year, and is the only natural way to flush salt, sediment and agricultural chemicals out of the MDB.

- * The flooding of the Ramsar site with sea water must not occur unless it is done in conjunction with the release of fresh water into the Lower Lakes system from the River Murray. To only flood the Lower Lakes with the sea could result in a hyper saline situation akin to the current scenario in the southern lagoon of the Coorong. As described above, the volume and timing of such releases must be based on credible science.
- * The viability of pumping hyper saline water out of the Southern Lagoon of the Coorong and into the Southern Ocean via a temporary pipeline should be assessed immediately.

(1) Close, A. 2002. Options for Reducing the Risk of Closure of the River Murray Mouth, MDBC Technical Report, 2002/2.