

First Flush Submission

Firstly we understand, appreciate and believe that the Barwon Darling River needs priming for the environment, river health and stock and domestic users most importantly.

However as a member of our local community, irrigator, stock and domestic user and interested party in the environment we believe that the first flush event in February 2020 was very badly managed.

Essentially every farm and flood plain event is unique. Therefore a blanket policy with no clear targeted guidelines or communication and no finalised plans in place made it a very difficult, frustrating and costly scenario for all stakeholders.

As an irrigator it takes years to understand the workings of an irrigation farm in a flood event. For example how to shift water around a farm to allow for best water catchment with minimum infrastructure damage. Therefore to have a blanket policy with no plans in place and no individual communication, despite us repeatedly calling various departments and requesting clarification, created major issues and concerns for us mentally, financially and structurally on our farm.

There was a definite lack of targeted policy about Megalitre numbers required and/or target points and any targets given kept on changing and again this created major management issues and concerns. For example whether to order fuel, fertiliser and engage additional employees.

Also we were currently in the worst drought in history, dreaming of drought breaking rain and financially and mentally we were in deficit with stock dying, no water for crops and a bleak weather forecast. The embargo inconsistency compounded our issues mentally and financially.

The final result in our unique scenario was that even though we had the ability to fill our storages through flood plain harvesting of water that would never have reached the Barwon River, the reality was that when the embargo was lifted we ended up pumping out of the river and the water that was lying on our farm evaporated. Therefore a very negative, frustrating and costly result for both the environment, the river and ourselves.

As a final point of note if it wasn't for the continuous rain and flows from Queensland the water users could have ended up with near empty storages on the Northern end of the system and overflowing storages in the Southern end- resulting in an unfair balance of water.

For future events there needs to be a finalisation of plans and policy with targeted consistent river and flow guidelines put in place and a clear communication method enabled to allow the fair and consistent sharing of water for all.