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From: Inquiry into the Management, Governance and Use of Environmental Water
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Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into the Management, Governance and Use of Environmental Water

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Management, Governance and Use of Environmental Water

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Executive Chairman
McPherson Media Group

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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My interest is chiefly personal; I live on the Goulburn River at Arcadia and have had a lifelong interest in the health of the river. I served on the Broken River Management Board and the Lower Goulburn Waterway Authority before river management functions were assumed by Catchment Management Authorities. I am also Convenor of Foodbowl Unlimited, a Goulburn Valley-based group that promoted the Foodbowl Modernisation Project.

Role of EW in Blackwater Events

The most serious blackwater events in recent memory have originated in tributaries rather than the Goulburn River itself - most recently the Sevens and Pranjip Creeks, where leaf litter had accumulated over many years, then blackened after rainfall events that were insufficient to flush the tributary floodplain. These events require a different approach than Blackwater events on the main river; in the Sevens event in early 2017, the CMA acted quickly with GMW to increase releases out of Nagambie Weir, but they took some time to have an impact and the most dangerous slug of water had passed. Another option - already flagged by the GBCMA - would be to access the irrigation system downstream of Nagambie Weir etc help moderate events where the stream concerned crosses the Eastern Main Channel. This would be possible with the Sevens, Pranjip, Honeysuckle and Pine Lodge Creeks, among others but would of course require infrastructure works.

Blackwater events in the Goulburn floodplain itself are of a different order and the river narrowly escaped very a very severe blackwater event in winter, 2016, when a moderate flood moved into parts of the floodplain that hadn't been watered since the beginning of the drought - and upstream of the Broken River confluence, since 1996.

The leaf litter load was enormous and the billabongs blackened within a week; fortunately the second flood followed, a little higher than the first, flushing out the blackwater with large volumes of fresh. This lucky course of events may not be counted on and, in my view, the possibility of devastating blackwater events is heightened with a much-reduced river flooding regime compared to last century.

Simply put, the Goulburn needs to have access to over-bank flows every 6-8 years to ensure this doesn't occur. The various constraints on large environmental flows must be worked through to allow this to happen, albeit very occasionally.

The problem of constraints, as a barrier to more efficient use.

I have been watching the environmental flow regime since it started in earnest five years ago and expressing my concerns to the GBCMA periodically. The management of these flows has much improved, since the early flows which were too sustained and caused considerable bank-softening and tree falls. More recent flows have better emulated "natural" river flows (higher in winter and spring) and been more cogniscent of users along the river, including campers around the popular holiday times and fishermen around the opening of the cod fishing season.

It seems to me the Environmental Water Holder is taking more notice from the CMA people "on the ground" as part of the this process and the current longitudinal study being carried out by the GBCMA and Commonwealth EWH is confirming the wisdom of this better EW management.

However, I hold deep concerns amount the amount of water required to navigate the Goulburn all year 'round to satisfy the needs of the Murray Darling Plan as well as inter-valley transfers and its impact on the river channel. Should the water volumes along the Goulburn increase further as a result of implementation of the Plan - particularly if the so-called "Up-water" becomes reality - it will be impossible to get it down the river channel without causing serious long-term damage, including bank softening and widening, shallowing out the stream bed and increasing water velocity, building to greater damage.

This is why is critical that the constraints issue be deal with in a way that allows large volumes of EW to pushed through the wider Gouburn floodplain, in shorter bursts rather than at sustained levels, replicating the natural flooding regime.

It is important that Victoria derives maximum benefit from EW as it passes through our rivers, streams and wetlands - and we are some distance away from that. While over-bank flooding of the Goulburn may necessarily continue to be a very occasional event, it is incumbent on the state to allow our considerable number of wetlands to drive a benefit from EW which - in the absence of over-bank flows - will require periodic pumping and other structural works to allow it.

I have nothing to add to other ToRs; I congratulate the committee for conducting this enquiry.

Ross McPherson

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File1:

File2:

File3: