

CONCERNED LAKE MERAN COMMUNITY MEMBERS

INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT, GOVERNANCE AND USE OF
ENVIRONMENTAL WATER SUBMISSION

On the weekend of the 8th and 9th of January 2017 the Lake Meran community and recreational users of the lake witnessed a black water event which had devastating consequences that resulted in hundreds of thousands of fish dying with the very unfortunate loss of many native fish.

With community input a large cleanup exercise on the public foreshore areas took place. The remaining rotting fish and stench left Lake Meran very unattractive for recreational use thus bringing the recreational season to a premature halt.

The Environmental Protection Authority and the North Central Catchment Management Authority informed the community that a thorough investigation would take place as to the cause of this event.

We understand that authorities with defined roles and responsibilities have obligations to respond to the community, particularly when this community depends on this resource for domestic and stock use.

Over a period of six months neither the EPA nor NCCMA has come forth with any report or findings relating to this event. Several requests have been made as to such a document.

Only a few comments in newspapers and a short presentation on social media revealed that authorities claimed that this was a naturally occurring event and was purely as a result of floodwater entering the lake a few months earlier with high levels of mobilised organic matter.

It's very important to note, when considering this event, the period leading up to the flood in the spring of 2016.

Under the new management regime of Lake Meran by the NCCMA, in early 2016 lake levels became very low.

With a receding waterline large areas of the lakebed were exposed.

This created perfect environmental conditions for the growth of large volumes of vegetation.

This vegetation was dominated by one very invasive plant called Knotweed that can grow over 200cm tall.

Following good rains in the winter, floodwater began flowing into Lake Meran during September and October 2016.

Large volumes of vegetation became inundated and the water soon overflowed into downstream lakes, Tobacco Lake and Round Lake. These lakes did not experience any fish kill event.

This floodwater had the usual tea colour that has been observed during past flood events over the decades.

When questions have been asked, authorities have avoided any suggestions that this black water event has had anything to do with submerged decomposing organic matter from the bed of the lake.

This is despite overwhelming photographic evidence taken by the NCCMA

themselves showing huge growth and stands of vegetation during early 2016.
(Please find enclosed)

Further questions need to be asked.

If this event was due to mobilised organic matter during the flood, why is it that the other down stream wetlands did not have a similar fish kill event?

The other observation by the local community was that water in the southern basins of the lake had a much more coca cola appearance (where there was higher levels of vegetation in those shallow areas) yet the northern basin appeared to have a more tea like colour.

Why are authorities avoiding any suggestion that the fish kill event is a result of submerged decomposing lakebed vegetation?

Historic lake levels have always been managed at sufficiently higher levels that prevented excessive lakebed vegetation growth.

The proposed Lake Meran Management Plan will encourage greater volumes of vegetation to grow on the lakebed leading to much more frequent black water events.

The inability of authorities to even consider these consequences highlights a hidden agenda and blatant attempt to achieve a highly unattractive water plan for Lake Meran and the broader community.

It is without doubt, if the proposed management plan is implemented, black water events and the devastating fish kills will become much more frequent.

As a recreational lake the benefit of higher lake levels is obvious. With boating, fishing, swimming and many other activities the flow on benefits to the community's wellbeing, happiness and economic health are obvious.

We ask for a renewed focus on mitigation volumes that reflect and acknowledge true historic channel water flows into Lake Meran. This would free up the Environmental Water Holder when allocating volumes to Lake Meran.

In relation to environmental water, authorities should start searching for those great social and economic benefits that also achieve great environmental outcomes rather than avoiding them.

We believe Lake Meran could play a part in addressing so many of those social and economic concerns facing the MDBP where environmental outcomes are achieved alongside people.

Thank you

