

Andrew Ash

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### **Experience**

- Lived locally for 62 years
- Business owner, boat building and fishing industry retailer
- Local scribe for fishing column local paper and radio fishing program for 35years

### **Before the Black Water 2010**

Fishing locally Swan Hill district was a premium location for Murray Cod and other native species. Murray Cod of all sizes were here in all streams and in big numbers. It was a common event to be able to land in excess of 50 Murray Cod in a single days outing...lots of large fish were here too, with catches over 50lb quite common.

A world class fishery it was.

We also had the only recognised big colony of Catfish in the Murray Darling Basin. These fish were in the Marraboor River above the Castle Donnington weir...Catfish an endangered species

Brim were also present in excellent numbers along with a very good population of Murray River Crayfish.

Some streams were also home for Platypus and lots of other aquatic life.

### **Black Water**

October 2010 the toxic Black Water had arrived coming off our forest and flood plains. Not 1 person alive had ever seen or ever heard of anything like this before.

A devastating event

Oxygen levels in all streams and waterways fell to levels of 0 and stayed at that level for weeks.

Nothing survived in the water.

The fish were the most visible floating on the surface, there were millions of them.

The Crayfish all walked out of the water and died or were taken by birds and foxes.

As the water receded, the shrimp and other aquatic life could be seen all dead lying in the toxic mud left behind.

Many birds also died and all the wading birds left because there was no food left in the water.

## **After the Blackwater**

The Blackwater finally was gone and there was nothing left.

- There were no fish.
- No Crayfish and no Shrimp or other aquatic life.
- The water birds were gone.
- Our Catfish were all gone from the Marraboor River.

Along with the fish went our fishing industry, visiting anglers just stopped coming.

Some locals sold their boats and took up golf.

Several stores closed their door or reduced staff.

Local Motels, Hotels, Caravan Parks and Petrol Stations were all severely affected.

Many locals suffered severe stress and some local farmers were reduced to tears watching their local streams turn to rivers of death.

Another toxic Black Water event occurred 2016 the devastation was similar to 2010.

The Murray was saved from total disaster above the Wakool Junction this time because of high flows of fresh water in the system. Oxygen levels did not go below the critical level in the Murray. The numbers of fish killed were less because most of them died in 2010.

## **In Summary:**

I don't have the answers for what caused this catastrophic event that no one has seen before. I do know what has changed in recent years and suspect may be influencing this Blackwater.

- Timber cutting has been stopped in our big forest areas along with grazing. Grass and leaves I understand are the major causes of Blackwater.
- The other thing that has changed is the newly introduced artificial watering of forest areas; this may also be having an effect.

Some Government agencies are saying it is a natural event , why then has it never happened before.

## **What have we lost?**

We have possibly lost many species of fish and other aquatic life, we do not know as there is no research into the either the cause, the devastation or the event.