

# Media Release



Friday July 22, 2011

## **Joint release from;**

Adrian Pederick – State member for Hammond, Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Food & Fisheries

Mitch Williams – State member for MacKillop, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for the River Murray, and for Water Security

Jamie Briggs – Federal member for Mayo

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In recent weeks, much publicity has been given in the media, the eastern states in particular, to attempts to raise public support to push for a radical change to the management of the barrages at the Murray Mouth in South Australia.

Under the heading of 'Myth and the Murray', the public have been subjected to a concerted campaign of misinformation about the true genesis of the Lower Lakes, through which the Murray passes on its way to the sea.

Correspondents continually claim the lakes were estuarine with a natural state alternating between fresh and salt depending on river flows and tidal movements.

Under the name, Myth and the Murray, mouthpiece Jennifer Marohasy insists the great majority of scientists, who agree the lakes are not naturally estuarine, are all wrong. The truth is that salt water incursion into the lakes was rare – between one and five percent of the last 7,000 years.

This does not mean that every year there are between four and 18 days the lakes were salt; it means that at certain rare times over the eons due to extraordinary conditions there were prolonged salt incursions. The last major incursion was some 1700-2000 years ago. Diatoms from the lake bed confirm this and that most incursions did not progress past Point Sturt, which is at the south west corner of Lake Alexandrina –only 20kms from the mouth.

The fact is the lakes perform a vital role in maintaining the health of the entire river system, which accumulates two million tonnes of salt each year - much of it from over the border.

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The barrages were constructed to maintain the lakes' fresh water status in the face of ballooning extractions for irrigation upstream, as discussed in the SA parliament in the late 1880s. They did not 'create' a freshwater environment, they restored and preserved one.

If it was as simple as pulling out the barrages and letting the sea in, why was it necessary to dredge the mouth continuously from 2002 to 2010, (at vast expense), to keep the mouth open during low or non-existent outflows?

No science is needed to know that without a reasonable outflow the mouth will silt up completely.

Ms Marohasy has constantly ignored the weight of scientific evidence against her claims. Let her list the scientists who support her argument that the Lower Lakes have been a fully estuarine waterbody for more than five per cent of the past 7000 years – particularly the last 1700 years.

In the past 40 years, SA has made better use of limited water resources than any other state. We had to. We have not increased our take of river water since 1969. Yet Myth and the Murray would have the public believe we in SA are the water wasters.

Instead of focusing solely on the bottom end of the river system, perhaps Ms Marohasy could draw attention to water inefficiencies in other states still using archaic, inefficient irrigation systems.

Irrigators and communities across the entire basin should be working cooperatively to preserve the health and viability of the waterway upon which we all depend.