

MEDIA RELEASE

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Agriculture, Food and Fisheries

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Salt dumping an insult to downstream communities – especially SA

An approval by the NSW government to allow a paper mill to dump 1500 tonnes of salt into the River Murray has caused concern and anger in South Australia.

Shadow Minister for the River Murray Adrian Pederick said the decision demonstrates that lessons learned about the importance of the river's health were being pushed aside.

'In SA, our natural desalination plant, the Lower Lakes that service the entire river system, has been strangled by decades of over-allocation and mismanagement to such an extent that the state government are contemplating providing neighbouring country communities with bottled water and putting a desalination plant at Tailem Bend to maintain potable water supplies.

'The Lower Lakes have for thousands of years coped with some two million tonnes of accumulated salt in the river annually. According to a CSIRO report in 2002, as much as half of that comes from across the border.

'We have been grappling with salinity in the river since the 60s and now have numerous salt interception schemes in the Riverland.

'This NSW plan is supposedly offset by a contingent proposal to extract 3000 tonnes of salt annually from another part of the Murray Darling Basin.

SA River Murray Minister Karlene Maywald assures us they will be watching to see the offset obligations are met but that offers little comfort to the thousands of South Australians who struggle with river salinity now.

'Offset sounds fine but we already know what can happen to the river immediately downstream of the mill if anything goes wrong, which some might say is inevitable.

'And if it's possible to remove 3000 tonnes elsewhere, why isn't that happening anyway?

'This smacks of deals done behind close doors and again it will be the river environment and local communities that will pay the price. We know a bit about that here in SA.

'The NSW department assures us detrimental impacts on water quality are "unlikely". If they're wrong, who wears the consequences?

'This could set a dangerous precedent and doesn't encourage manufacturers to find other innovative, non-threatening ways of dealing with their waste.'