

SUPPORT SERVICES OFFICE

- 9 OCT 2008

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tour report

**Central-western NSW and Southern Queensland
July 6th - 11th 2008**

**Adrian Pederick MP JP
Member for Hammond**

Objective

The objective of the trip was to inspect water storages, diversion channels and the condition of natural water-courses in the north-western part of New South Wales and Southern Queensland and meet with individuals who have local knowledge and understanding of the situation in the region.

This was done with a view to determining availability of water for the preservation of the Lower Lakes and Coorong.

An additional purpose was to understand the causes of low flows and identify weaknesses in the current management system that allow excessive extraction/diversion of water.

Sunday 6th

Road journey from Coomandook to Menindee, NSW

Distance 636kms

Overnight Menindee

Monday 7th

Toured Menindee Lakes complex with NSW State Water's facility manager – Mike Arandt.

- Mike described the lakes system and explained how the lakes are filled or emptied according to supply and demand.
- He explained that the lakes supply Broken Hill with 10gl/yr. To hold 21 months supply in reserve, the lakes need to have 250gl stored to cover losses.
- Transmission losses between Bourke and Menindee in 1998 were 60 percent.
- The lakes' operations are funded 75% by MDBC and 25% by NSW govt.
- Lakes Cawndilla and Menindee are currently unused because they have hundreds of gigitalitres of 'dead water' storage. This water cannot be usefully held in them as it is inaccessible and then evaporates away. They require some re-engineering to overcome this.
- The two 'active' Lakes - Pamamaroo and Wetherill -only hold 615gl between them. This is below the trigger point for release to SA of 640gl.
- Mike believes the bottom lakes – currently empty and dry since 2005 – should be re-engineered for use and the Menindee regulator made bigger.
- Cubbie holds almost the same amount of water as the two top lakes.
- Flows above Wilcannia are completely unregulated.
- Mike feels there are better ways of managing the system.

Monday afternoon - road journey Menindee to Wilcannia

Distance - 154kms

Overnight Wilcannia

Photos: 1, 2, 3, 4.

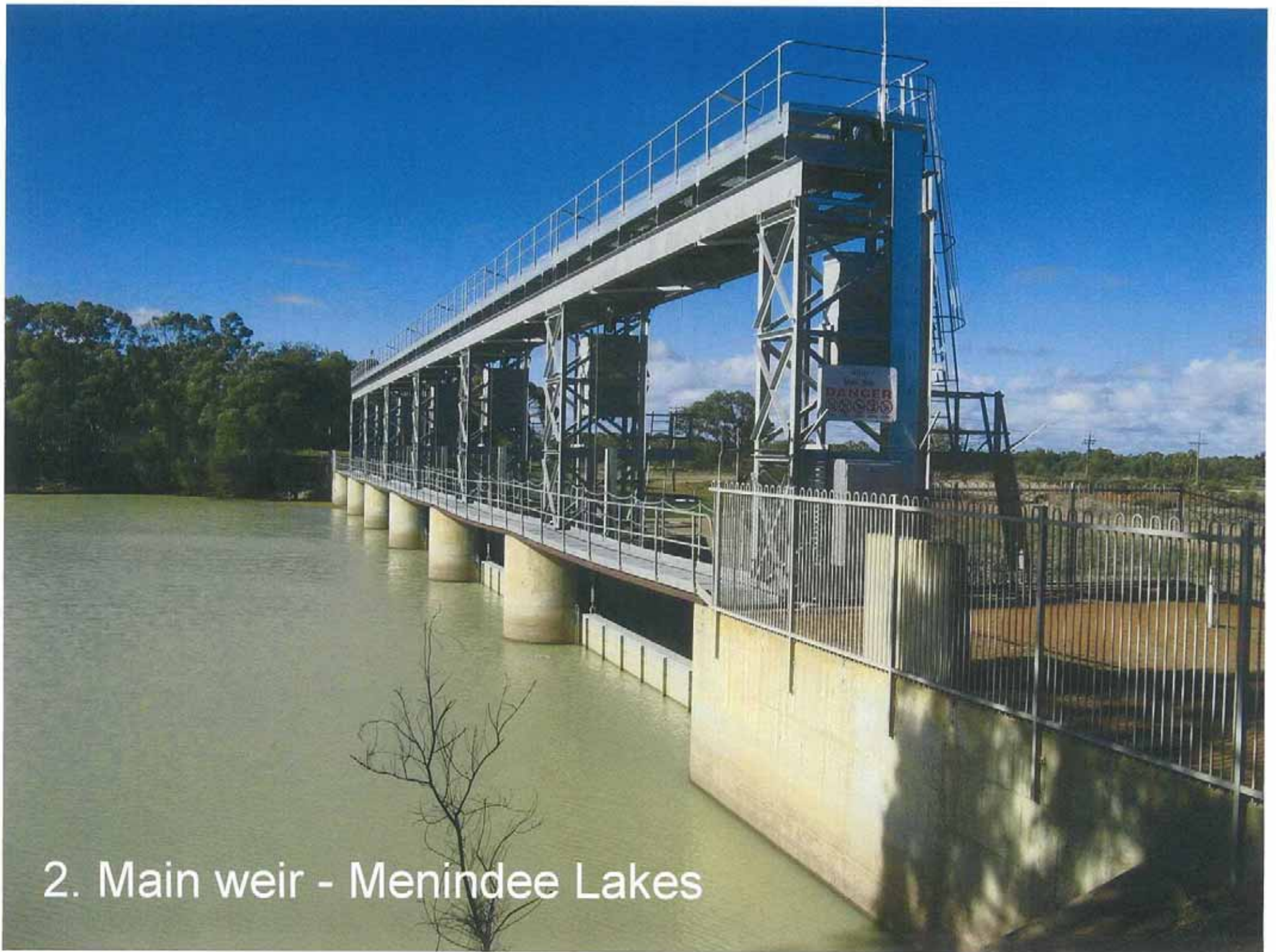
State water
Lake Pamamaroo Outlet Regulator

DANGER

BOATING PROHIBITED SWIMMING PROHIBITED FISHING PROHIBITED WATER SKIING PROHIBITED

Lake Pamamaroo - Menindee Lakes



2. Main weir - Menindee Lakes



3. Lake Menindee - dry



4. Regulator on empty Lake Cawndilla
- note water levels near top of tower

Tuesday 8th

Morning.

Met with local grazier Mark Etheridge – Wilcannia.

Mark is Vice President of the Australian Floodplain Association, formed in 2005 to present graziers concerns about the excessive extraction of water upstream, which has greatly affected their viability as well as local eco-systems.

Among the various statistics detailed by Mark were the following points.

- He calculates there is probably 900gl in private storages in sthn Qld.
- Toorale Station, (SW of Bourke and recently bought by the Federal and NSW govts), only stores about 20gl but can flood up to 40,000ha of floodplain, using 160gl of water. Only 300ml/day flows past Louth, which is also on the Warrego, just downstream from Toorale.
- Mark said irrigators earn \$150/ml of water growing cotton. He can produce \$60,000/ml growing organic lamb.
- He noted that the average time between floods has doubled and is concerned that the NSW govt, while banning any further development, seems set to 'allow/licence' all existing illegal storages.
- He believes the NSW Dept of Energy and Water is under-resourced and unable to effectively manage legal and illegal diversions.

Afternoon

Wilcannia – Tilpa, distance 121kms.

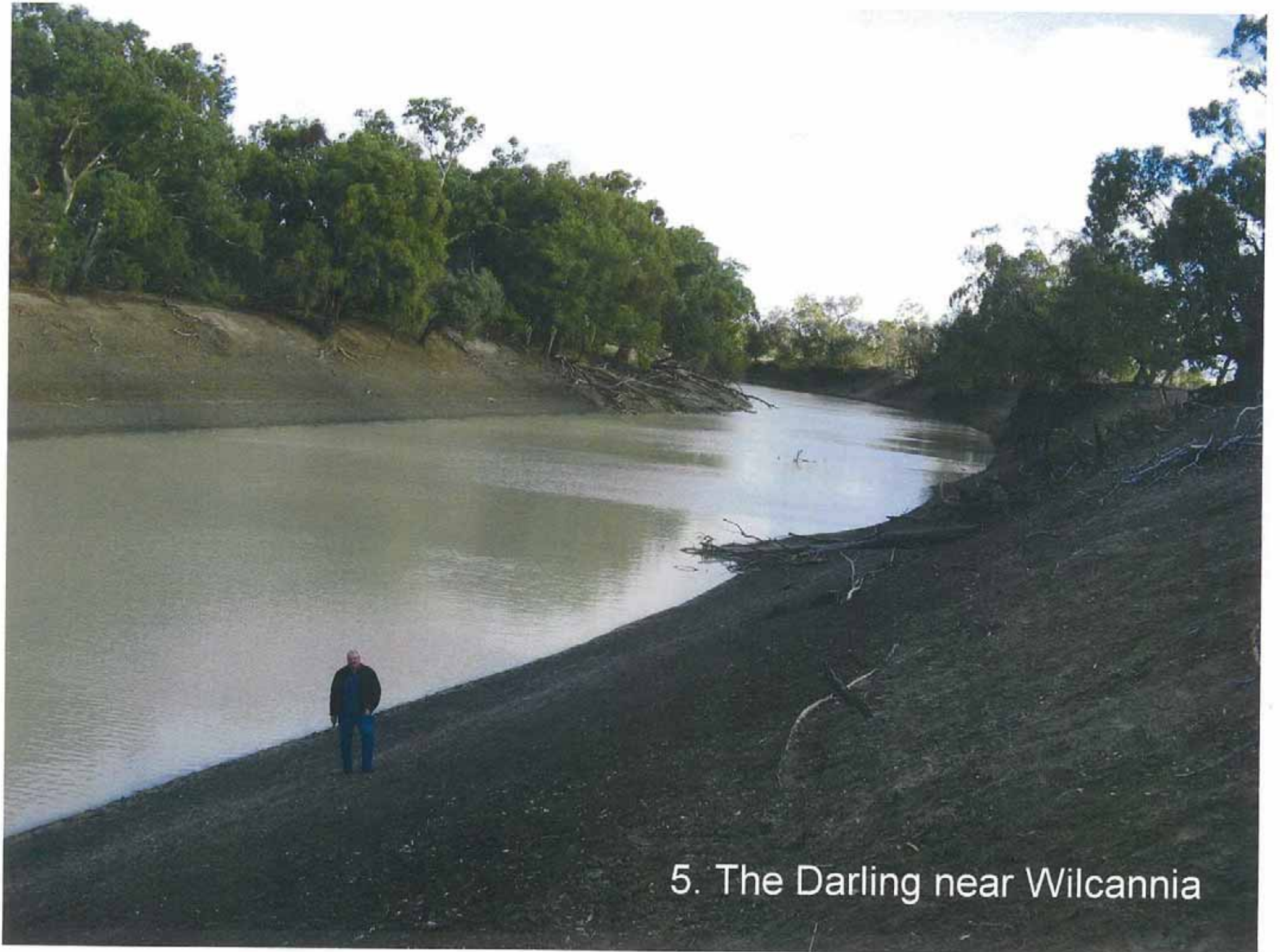
Met with Justin McClure, grazier.

- He said the govt is not buying back unregulated flows and there is the potential for a lot of it to be acquired above Wilcannia.
- He understands that Toorale was required to allow at least 20ml/day past Louth but it was not properly policed. The NSW govt has cut staff recently and the 'local' licensing officer lives in Surfers Paradise.
- NSW irrigators are very active politically and trying to stall change.

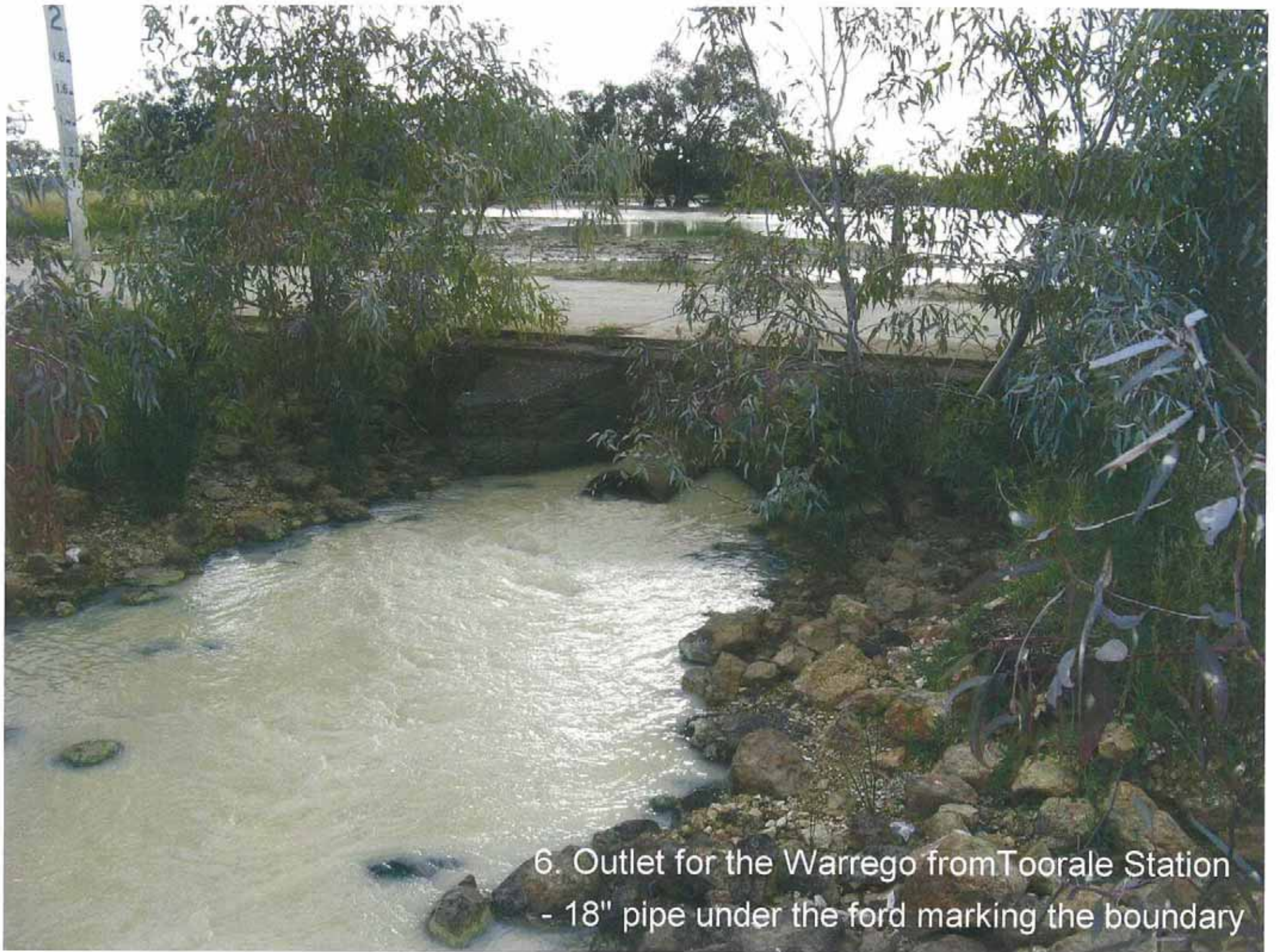
Road journey to Bourke, distance 191kms

Overnight Bourke.

Photos: 5, 6.



5. The Darling near Wilcannia



6. Outlet for the Warrego from Toorale Station
- 18" pipe under the ford marking the boundary

Wednesday 9th

Road journey Bourke to Goodooga –distance 182kms

Met with Ed Fessey at Goodooga, north of Brewarinna and close to the Qld border. Ed is Chair of the Lower Balonne Water Users Group and a long time campaigner against excessive and unregulated extractions.

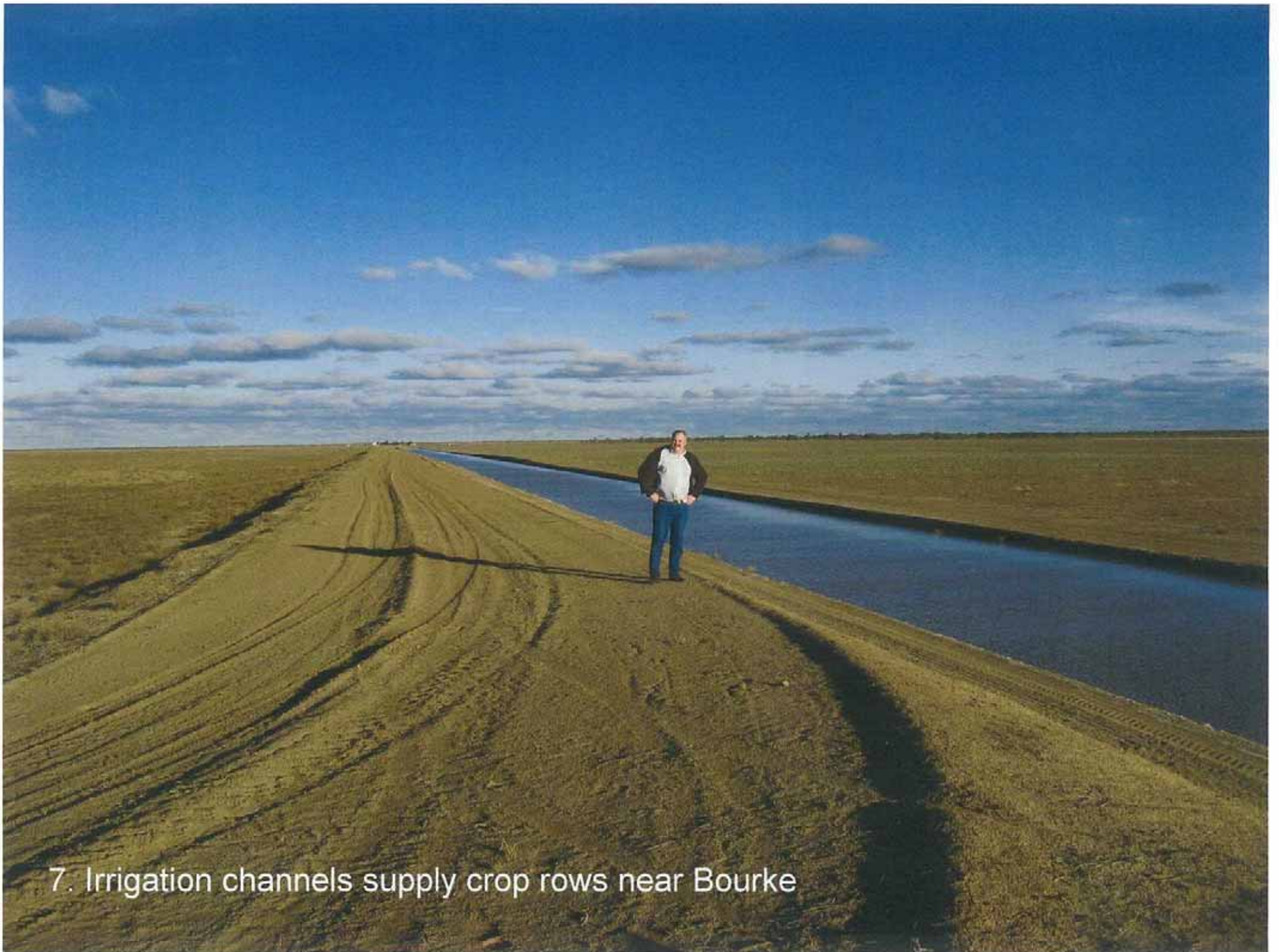
- He explained that following rainfall in Dec/Jan three tributaries had contributed 1056gl into the Bendouree Dam above St George. 768gl passed St George and only 240gl made it to the border. He stated that normally 40% of that flow would pass into NSW.
- Part of the problem is the lack of metering with as few as one pump in six metered.
- Cubbie currently has 15,000ha of gravity irrigated wheat.
- Another problem is getting reclaimed flows past diverters. There are 22 major irrigators below St George as floodplain harvesting is completely unregulated.
- Pump heights should be raised because low flows are vital to continued river health.
- It's the big operators who hold most of the water.
- The 'commence to pump' heights should be raised.
- Ed told of an irrigator who was asked to account for the pumping of 700ml on Boxing Day 2005. He explained he was just flushing his pumps.

Return to Bourke - distance – 182kms

Overnight Bourke.

During the evening spoke by telephone with Murray McClure of Trevallyn Station in the West Darling country near Wilcannia. Murray discussed his concerns for the deteriorating floodplains and the general mismanagement of the nation's water resources and the entire river environment.

Photos: 7, 8.



7. Irrigation channels supply crop rows near Bourke



8. Holding ponds by the Darling at Bourke.

Thursday 10th

Private flight From Bourke north across Darling and Paroo floodplains, across the NSW/Qld border to the St. George region. Duration 4 hours.

- I was able to observe from the air all the storages and diversion channels around the region, including Cubbie Station. (Cubbie is only one of 22 major irrigation companies below St George.)
- Diversion channels are often wider than the source river.
- A weir is located below the diversion – presumably to hold the water level up in times of low flow and maintain diversion.
- Water is held in massive shallow, open country – either scrub country or machine made with levy banks - and channelled great distances to the individual laser-levelled paddocks for gravity-irrigation.

During the drive to Cobar later that day, I inspected numerous large open storages and saw many irrigated crops. I also saw the dry Macquarie River bed.

*Bourke to Cobar; distance - 160kms
Overnight Cobar*

Photos: [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#).

Friday 11th

*Road trip back to Coomandook
Distance – 969kms.*

Summary of results

The trip enabled me to better understand the weaknesses that exist along the upper reaches of the Murray Darling system and discuss with local land-owners and farmers the effects of low-flows on the region itself, as well as further downstream.

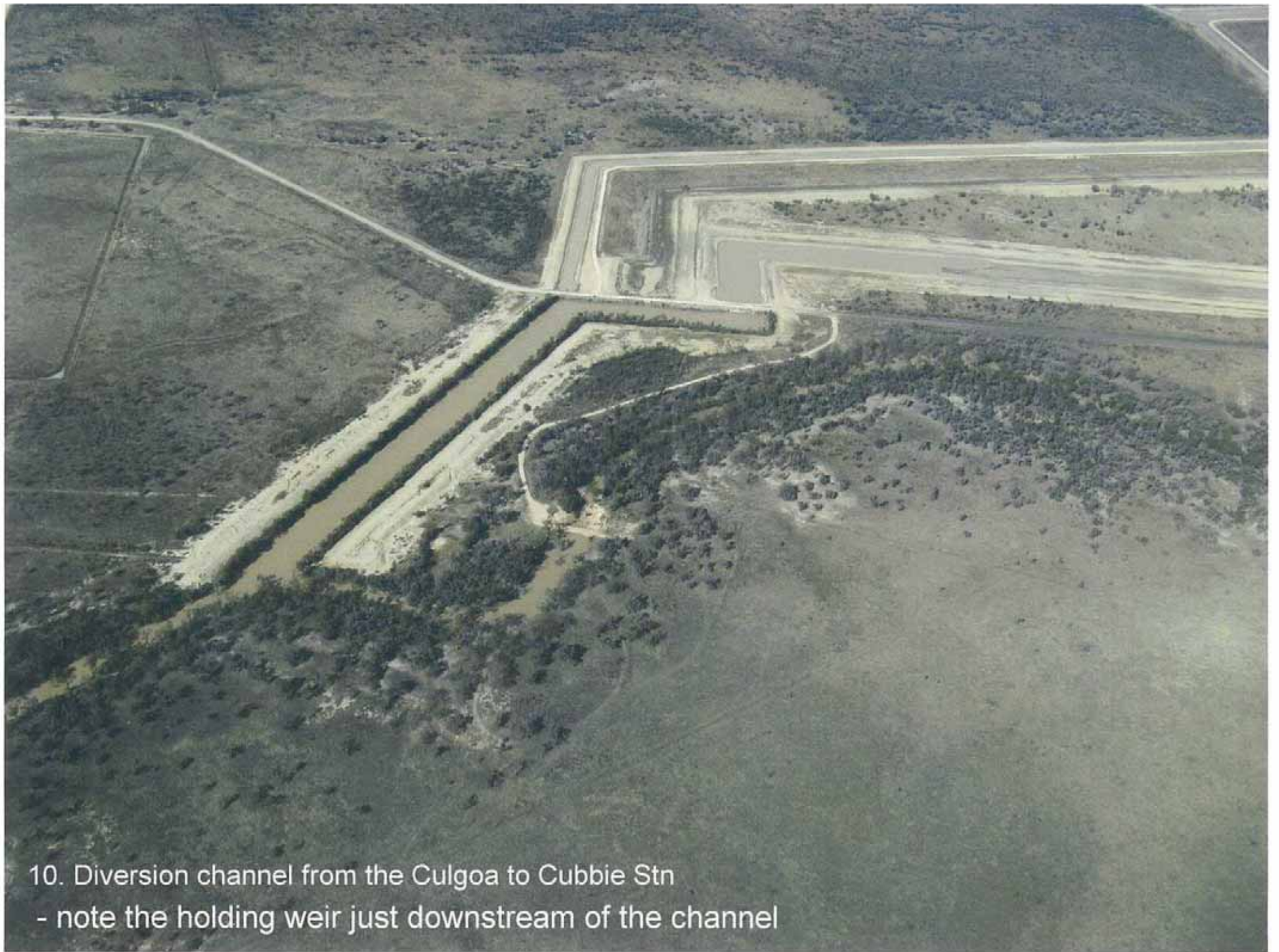
Land-owners and farmers in the region are also suffering as a result of massive diversions upstream to the detriment of long-established and traditional farming practices as well as the region's river and floodplain environment.

(A fourth generation Lower Lakes fisherman has stated that until the last decade or two, around 20 percent of the Murray's flow into Lake Alexandrina was Darling water – readily identifiable because of its colour. No Darling water is seen in the lower Murray these days.)

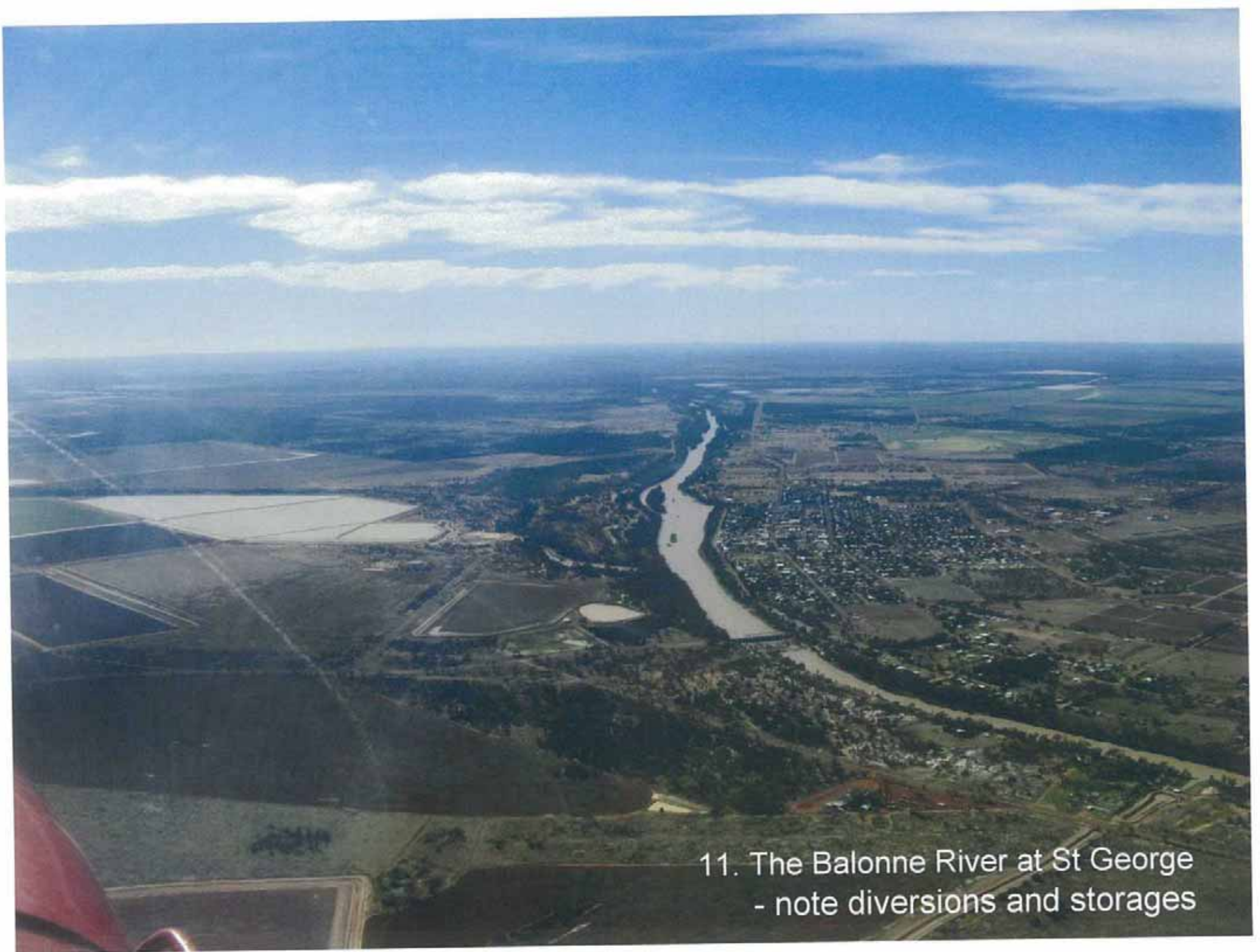
Arguments prevail that transmission losses of 70-80 percent reduce the value and effectiveness of allowing river flows. It should be borne in mind that such losses are part of the system and are taken into account in providing the 201 gigalitres for SA's critical human needs.



9. 1000s of hectares of wheat and water



10. Diversion channel from the Culgoa to Cubbie Stn
- note the holding weir just downstream of the channel



11. The Balonne River at St George
- note diversions and storages



12. Artificial storages at St George

13. Water storage - note diversion channel from river at bottom left and river bed downstream at right





14. Diversion channel from Balonne Minor for Cubbie
a few kilometres east of the Culgoa diversion



15. Acres of irrigated wheat and storage ponds



16. Acres of irrigated wheat and storage ponds.

Recommendations

More thorough and extensive research on the continued viability and health of the river system from headwaters to river mouth is vital to establishing the river's true capacity and subsequent sustainable extraction levels.

Given the uncertain nature of inflows and the projected effects of climate change on inflows and water quality, it is apparent that management practices in the past were based on the assumption that there would always be plenty of water and are therefore completely inadequate to ensure the river remains viable in the future.

It is apparent that government policies in the eastern states have been both inadequate and monitoring of those regulations has been grossly insufficient to guarantee any lasting outcome.

Lack of accurate measurement of extractions, storage efficiencies and subsequent irrigation pumping quantities has allowed significant waste and illegal diversion to go unchecked.

We must continue to press for a full audit of the entire river system including its tributaries to clearly establish the limitations of the resource.

Accurate metering of diversions at the point of extraction as well as pumping from holding storages will facilitate better calculation of effectiveness of storage and distribution leading to improved efficiencies in water use. It also allows for identification of illegal diversions and earthworks.

All river basin activity is dependent on healthy, flowing rivers. Greater communication and information exchange across the border is required to ensure that decisions are based on facts, are equitable and preserve the integrity of the entire river system.

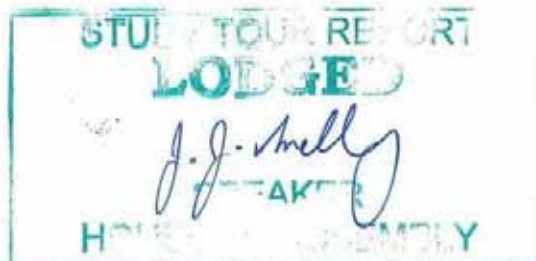
Photo:

17. The Murray at Tooleybuc, NSW.

Signed



Adrian Pederick MP JP
October 9th, 2008





17. The Murray at Tooleybuc, NSW.