



Save the Murray

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Floodplains



A floodplain is the area of relatively flat land either side of a stream covered by water during a major flood. It contains layers of sediments, generally high in nutrients deposited by the river during floods.

What is the difference between floodplains and wetlands?

Wetlands are permanently or temporarily covered by water, whereas floodplains are only covered with water during floods.

Why are floodplains important?

Floodplains play an important role when rivers flood. They act to dissipate water over a larger surface area, slowing the rate of flow and reducing the erosion of banks during flooding events. The dispersal of water over the flood plain also acts to remove pollutants from river waters. Some scientists regard floodplains as the 'engine rooms' of our river systems, playing a vital but often unrecognised role.

Why are floodplains threatened?

The natural processes of flooding and subsequent nutrient dispersal over the floodplain in the Murray Darling Basin has been disturbed. For the past 150 years, floodplains along the River Murray have been developed for agricultural, recreational and industrial purposes, thus dividing them from the river system. River Murray floodplains are now covered with water only once in 10 or 12 years compared to every 3 or 4 years out of 5 a century ago. This change has brought about a decline in flora and fauna species previously thriving on the floodplain.