



Save the Murray

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Environmental Flows



An 'environmental flow' is any managed change in a river flow pattern intended to maintain or improve river health. Environment flows can be achieved through;

- Making the best use of water currently available to the environment
- Saving water lost in channels and other distribution systems and redirecting it to the environment
- Reducing the amount of water removed from the river for human use

Why do we need Environmental Flows?

There is evidence the River Murray is in trouble. Poor water quality; loss of native plants, animals, fish, forests and wetlands; and an increase in pests such as carp, all point to a river and a landscape in serious decline. Scientific advice indicates that if we do nothing, the river's health will get worse. This will affect irrigation and other industries, native plants and animals and our communities both within and outside of the basin.

One of the main causes of the River Murray's decline is the large amount of water we take from the rivers of the Basin for town and irrigation uses. The need to supply this water during summer and autumn has also reversed the natural seasonal flow patterns in parts of the River Murray.

Historically, flows in the River Murray were unpredictable. High flows occurred most often in spring and early summer and low flows were typical in autumn and winter. Development has meant peak demand for water in spring and summer and a need for constant supply throughout the rest of the year. The construction of locks and weirs has altered flow regimes to keep the river at seasonally unnatural levels

The declining health of the River Murray has become increasingly apparent over the past decade and has been discussed at length by the Ministerial Council and stakeholders as well as in the media and community.

The return of some water to the River Murray is thought to be necessary to create a healthy working river; one that assures us of continued prosperity, clean water and a flourishing environment. A healthy working river is one that is managed to provide a compromise, agreed to by the community, between the conditions of the river and the level of human use. This requires an acceptable balance to be found between the often competing values of the river.

How can we get Environmental Flows?

The Murray-Darling Basin Commission, as part of its Living Murray program has implemented a water recovery project. The overall target for the first step is an average of 500 GL of environmental water per year by June 2009. Significant progress has been made to date, however most water will only become available between 2008 and 2009. Specific projects in each state are in various stages of implementation to recover water for environmental flows in the River Murray.