

Canberra Correspondent

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In Canberra the bureaucrats have been busy getting ready to go 'public' with the Federal Governments definition of what constitutes socially and economically neutral in the hunt for an additional 450 ggalitres.

Both NSW and Victoria have delivered there versions of what they believe is socially and economically acceptable and from their media releases it would seem they are not on the same page as the Federal agencies.

You'd think it would be difficult for organisations who have been 'consulting' communities over Basin Plan issues since John Howard's Australia Day speech in 2007 to stuff up another round of consultation. For those following the spawning of the Basin Plan and the desire by each Minister to be more earnest and sincere in their commitment to delivering it on time and on full, this comes as no surprise.

I am appalled that Commonwealth believes it's acceptable to announce meeting times and no venues on the Friday before they start. I received a form email from the Commonwealth agency responsible after the first meeting was over inviting me to attend!

I have a number of questions that I'd like answered such as why do people have to register to find out where the venues are? What is the big secret? Why is this behaviour acceptable?

I believe a strong message must be sent that this type of consultation is insulting.

Over the last 2 months the focus has been on the following areas –

- 450 ggalitre upwater and revisiting the need for it. It is crucial that the government understand that the 450gl can only be delivered if constraints are 'lifted' and the social and economic outcomes are neutral or better. There is no evidence I can find that the Commonwealth can deliver on these key commitments. This is not stopping them from changing the 'narrative' around what can and can't be delivered.
- Media coverage has been sparse on the Basin Plan. The SA Royal Commission has not been generating much interest.
- I've attended meetings on behalf of Speak Up – such as the Webinar Water Infrastructure Fund and believe that we should put in an EoI for a massive project to return flows to the Coorong by rerouting all of the South East Drainage Scheme (water currently flowing out to the

ocean) via a channel back to the Coorong. It'd have to be a billion dollar plus project returning more water than they ever imagined at a fraction of the cost to MDB communities. It's a winner which would at the very least provide a very good media focus on the issues surround the Coorong and the south east drainage scheme.

- Provided both proactive and reactive social media support, and media advice to Speak Up
- Advisory to Speak Up on submissions and planning of events

My current concerns and areas which need attention include –

- There is a growing mantra being muttered by some that the 450 ggalitres is tied to the 605 ggalitres. I do not believe this to be the case. If you have supporting documents on this issue can you please send them to me.
- MINCO in Melbourne will be held at a critical junction in the Basin Plan. The meeting is set to decide whether another 450 ggalitres of LTAAY water will be removed. The meeting maybe postponed if the Victorian election is close or there isn't a Victorian Water Minister at that meeting.
- There could be a Federal election at anytime between now and May. Until then Independent Members of Parliament are in a strong position to decide key policy issues and force their constituents concerns to the front of the solving them queue.
- There will be a NSW election in March.

Over the next six to eight weeks Speak Up should focus on:

Election campaigns over the next couple of months will be critical to key outcomes. People should not be shy in letting their concerns and solutions be known, nor should Speak Up.

Key messages should be dusted off and given a good run when talking to Candidates and the flavours they represent.

It is also important that the Government understand just how insulting it is that after four months since Speak Up was mobbed by adoring police officers after our blue shirts were unveiled at the Hyett during the last MinCo meeting, that they are only now are coming to ask communities what is acceptable to them on key issues such as the recovery of anymore water or environmentally equivalent water.