

Fresh Water Embassy: Clayton Bay: June 17, 2010

Visit from Paul Caica - The Minister who was there.



4.30pm he said and there he was. The Minister for the Minister for Environment and Conservation, Minister for the River Murray, Minister for Water stood at the regulator at Clayton Bay with locals. He listened. He asked questions. He responded. People had travelled from Mannum, Murray Bridge, Langhorne Creek, Milang and Finniss to be at Clayton Bay for the meeting.

“We are making history here today. This is the first time a Minister for the Environment has visited the community. We are all too familiar with the photo-op visits of Ministers to our shores but no minister has been so accessible”, said Prof Diane Bell to the some 40 people gathered around the fire drum at the Fresh Water Embassy at Clayton Bay.

The Minister (call me Paul) was candid, clear about his responsibilities and set out his new regime in a measured manner.

We asked that he address four keys issues.

1. Wellington (Pomanda Island) weir
2. The Regulators - Clayton Bay and Currency Creek
3. The Water Allocation Plan for the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges
4. Consultation and communication with the local community.

These will be ongoing conversations and the Minister gave an undertaking to respond promptly. Highlights were

1. There will be no permanent weir across the River Murray below Wellington
2. The silt from the removal of the Clayton Regulator will not be put into Lake Alexandrina.
3. An agreement to pursue the WAPs and get back to us
4. A pledge to engage in respectful communication with the community and a willingness to countenance respectful disagreement.

Helen Griffith, Mannum, spoke for the too often overlooked non-agricultural sector and stressed that the river must come first. Kathryn Rothe, Murray Bridge, emphasised the need for the River Murray and Lakes Alexandrina and Albert to remain connected.

John Tregenza, Chair, Finnis Catchment Group spoke of the failure of the 'ecological refuge' created by the regulator and the need to pay heed to local knowledge.

Kayrn Bradford, Milang Old School House Community Centre Co-ordinator, explained the social dislocation caused by the regulators and Marie-Claire, Langhorne Creek asked that we be informed of Ministerial visits.

Liz Yelland of Point Sturt presented the Minister with a copy of her book *Rory* about the travels of a river beacon and Diane Bell presented the Minister with the Fresh Water Embassy "Award for the Minister who was there". Remember the one who wasn't?

The light was failing, but the wind had dropped, so we showed the Minister the displays of maps, photographs and literature on which we had been working. The materials covered the activities of the Fresh Water Embassy at Clayton and in Adelaide, a scale model of the weir below Wellington (Pomanda Island) and banners.

Of course, we concluded with tea and scones from the kitchen of Gloria Jones topped off with fig jam from Diane's.

The rain has refreshed the country. Environmental flows into Lake Alexandrina have raised the level and lowered the salinity. The poorest quality water is now in the Goolwa Lake- the so-called ecological refuge. It is time to remove the regulators.



For further information contact Diane Bell 0427 554 194

Visit www.hurrysavetheMurray.com for information about the Embassy.