



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Murray-Darling Basin

SPEECH

Wednesday, 16 September 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date	Wednesday, 16 September 2015	Source	House
Page	10494	Proof	No
Questioner		Responder	
Speaker	McCormack, Michael, MP	Question No.	

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (09:44): The imminent return of water to the Agriculture portfolio is long overdue. Not only was it a motion unanimously passed at the weekend's National Party conference in Canberra, but it was also one of the main items of the coalition agreement negotiated between the Nationals leader, the member for Wide Bay, and the new Liberal leader, the member for Wentworth, yesterday. Of course, Labor's South Australian members of parliament and the Greens were swift to condemn the move, which undoubtedly means it is a good thing. I am always intrigued when I see the member for Melbourne get up in this place and parrot precisely the same lines on the same day as the would-be Labor leader, the member for Sydney, and those lines are repeated then by GetUp! and the unions—same lines, same ideology. Labor and the Greens were certainly on a unity ticket when it came to the Murray-Darling Basin in the last parliament, and nothing has changed since Labor was deservedly replaced by the coalition as the government in 2013. The Greens want all the water in the basin to flow out the mouth of the Murray and into the Southern Ocean.

Jennifer Marohasy has forgotten more about Murray-Darling matters than any city based Green will ever know. In March 2014, she wrote a fascinating article about that great explorer of Australia Matthew Flinders and how he missed mapping the Murray mouth. She wrote:

Flinders had been sailing east and had chartered the Spencer Gulf and the Gulf St Vincent on which Adelaide is now situated. While Baudin—

Frenchman Nicolas Baudin—

was sailing west charting the coast from the "Promontoire de Wilson" including the inlet of Port Philip, on which the city of Melbourne is now situated.

While the two countries were at war, the two captains meet amicably and exchanged maps and information, in particular Flinders explaining to Baudin where he could find freshwater on Kangaroo Island.

Flinders was unaware that he had just sailed past the mouth of the longest river in Australia, the orifice to the Murray Darling Basin.

There is no river mouth on Flinders' map of the shoreline of Encounter Bay. Rather he wrote "low and sandy topped with hummocks of almost bare sand" and described the region of Lake Alexandrina as "low land".

Historians have written that this acclaimed navigator and cartographer "missed" the Murray's mouth. It is perhaps more likely that the Murray's mouth had simply closed-over.

Of course it had! That is nature. I appreciate that the Lower Lakes are important. I appreciate that water icon sites and Ramsar wetlands need a drink up and down the system, but what I do not understand is this constant barrage—if you pardon the pun—of criticism copped by irrigators from the Greens. What I do not get is why wetting a recently identified supposed puddle is suddenly more critical than the livelihood of a Riverina food or fibre producer. What I do not get is why my family farmers have to account for and pay for every single drop of water they receive, yet environmental water is just forced downstream, dictated by a date on a plan by some perfunctory bureaucrat. Never mind how much rain might have fallen downstream or that there might have already been a flood event looming. Who cares that a gushing river could cause bank erosion on that low-lying land and landholders could be put under water? This week things started to change, and that is a good thing for Australia and for my Riverina electorate.