

Submission from GTBackhouse

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7-1-11
Secretary
SC

Unless the recent history of the Murray is understood it is not possible to make sensible decisions...
about its future. The Barmah forest at the time of settlement was an open Savannah woodland probably with understory plants common to the area and mainly large red gums at open spacing. There was not much regeneration going on.

When sawmilling started some large red gums were ring barked and one small section was left uncut. This encouraged the trees to flower and produce fertile seed. Trees came up where the logs were hauled out and when cattle were introduced trees germinated in the hoof marks. Thus a much denser forest came into being. When rabbits came in about 1880-90 there was no regeneration and loss of understory until myxomatosis in 1950. Rabbits and grazing would also have denuded the upper levels of the river banks and the lagoons and wetlands. Prior to settlement river banks and wetlands would have been covered with extensive vegetation: phragmites, reeds, rushes, couch etc.

With the introduction of carp c 1960 the river and more permanent wet areas were invaded by huge numbers of carp resulting in dramatic changes. There were extensive beds of ribbon plants in the shallower parts of the river. Now the banks are completely bare, tree roots are exposed and there are no beds of filtering plants in the river.

In the 1950s it was possible to see fish in a spotlight at night because the river was so clear.

RECOMMENDATIONS
1 Increase funding for research and development for eradication of carp
2 Reintroduce all the water plants to the river bed and the plants that occupied the banks originally

3 The thickly treed red gum forests may be part of the problem. Remove a considerable percentage of the existing trees which date c1840-c1890. This would reduce the river water loss during drought and eventually restore the forests to their Savannah status.

PROVINANCE OF INFORMATION The information about the Barmah forest came via a retired Nathalia school teacher who had known a retired forester who had worked in the Barmah forest. The forester also had a photograph taken in the early days - possibly from the riverine herald - supporting the contention of an open forest. All the forests above the mallee regions have had similar management and have high density smaller trees replacing fewer large trees.

I have lived on the Murray since 1927 and have witnessed the changes that came with myxomatosis and the disappearance of rabbits in 1950 and the changes that came with carp in the 1960s.

I believe that with management the health of the river can be restored without large environmental flows. While carp remain in large numbers no amount of water will restore the river health to a satisfactory level.

I recently raised the issue of carp with a spokesman for the Murray Darling Assn of Shires and he suggested we should learn to live with carp in the river and that numbers had reduced naturally. I believe that the only reason carp may have reduced is because they have eaten the river out and there is not the feed available because of the denuded state of the river.

SUBMISSION TO MURRAY DARLING BASIN AUTHORITY
17-12-10
NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT RECEIVED

