

'Salt dump' claim denied

By MELODY MONTAGUE

THE Wilderness Society has launched a scathing attack on Murray-Darling Basin irrigators, accusing them of using South Australia as a "salt dump".

The environmental advocacy group said record profits of more than \$8 billion announced by "big irrigation" had come at a huge cost to the environment and the people of SA.

"*The Age* in Melbourne recently reported (the profits) at a time when 'big irrigation' is refusing to reduce the amount of water it takes from the river system and recognise the urgent need to restore the Murray Darling Basin to health," a report from the society read.

SA campaign manager Peter Owen called for the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to base its plan on the advice of

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PETER OWEN, THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

Australia's leading river scientists, not "big irrigation".

"The MDBA's plan, currently out for public consultation, is supposed to restore the health of the river system," Mr Owen said.

"To do this it must adopt the scientific advice and address the massive over-allocation of water that is destroying the

Murray - South Australia's lifeline.

"South Australia has become the nation's salt dump with our natural systems destroyed and our drinking water security compromised because big irrigators in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria are taking too much water out of the river."

The society has launched a campaign appealing to SA's federal MPs to speak up for the health of the Murray.

Members have organised a series of billboards to be displayed within the electorates of federal MPs Kate Ellis and Christopher Pyne saying, "No future on a dead river: SA needs a healthy Murray".

Fighting back against The Wilderness Society's accusations, Griffith winery owner Darren De Bortoli said basin irrigators and irrigation groups should not accept the blame for SA's bad decisions.

"The stupidity of some of the environmental groups is shown by the hypocrisy of their statements," Mr De Bortoli said.

"Most of the salt that needs to be flushed through the Lower Lakes is contributed by South Australians themselves.

"Ninety-four per cent of south-east South Australia's wetlands have been decimated by 1500 kilometres of drains, flushing the wetlands straight to the sea, which is killing their sea grasses."

Before European settlement, wetlands made up 40 per cent of south-east SA.

Mr De Bortoli said, in addition to flows from the Murray-Darling Basin, water had previously flowed into the southern lagoon of the Coorong, as well as pushing all the way through the Murray mouth.

"The magnitude of the destruction caused by South Australians is without comparison," he said.