

## Using ‘Bent’ Evidence to Support a Cause? – an example - the RLCAG on the regulator and weed in Clayton Bay

The River Lakes and Coorong Action Group has been loudly opposed to both the Wellington Weir when it was first canvassed by the SA Government as a possible response to extreme drought, and more recently to the Clayton ‘regulator’ – an earthen bank which enabled the Goolwa Channel to be refilled with water when Lake Alexandrina was ‘drying down’ to a metre below sea level in 2009. In their attempts to persuade others to support their position, from the outset this group has appeared to show little regard for the relevant facts.

A document published on their website on January 18<sup>th</sup> 2011, includes a ‘log entry’, which makes reference to the remaining portion of the partly removed Clayton regulator as follows,

***“1.00 pm: stand on the cliff above the regulator at Clayton Bay (the last ‘lock’ on the might Murray); regulator must be completely removed; bay is filling with weed; the flood waters cannot flush Clayton Bay, Lake Albert or scour the coast of Hindmarsh Island as they would if the flows were ‘restored’ and ‘natural’ as the SA Government asserts they are.”*** (my emphasis)

- showing this photograph of the remaining portion of the regulator



***Clayton Bay regulator – river still partially blocked.***

*Photograph Diane Bell (caption and photo - RLCAG website)*

The clear inference is that if this regulator had been completely removed (or had it not been built), unrestricted flood water flows would have prevented the accumulation of aquatic ‘weed’ growth in the bay (and it is true that in mid January a large area of Sago Pondweed did develop in the bay at Clayton Bay). Given this fact, the RLCAG statements appear to be plausible, and anyone not fully aware of the facts of the matter might be persuaded to support RLCAG opposition to the regulator (and their position on other issues).

### **But the truth of the matter is this –**

- the remaining portion of the earth regulator can be seen to be protruding from the Hindmarsh Island (southern) shore of the channel.
- its effect on flood water flow is to deflect the main current northwards, **away** from Hindmarsh Island and **into** the bay at Clayton Bay, as shown in the following photographs



**The remaining regulator wall deflects the current flow towards Clayton Bay**

Photo: Trevor Harden



**Strong flows into the bay at Clayton Bay.** Photo: Trevor Harden

Thus the weed growth has occurred despite, and not because of, the effects of the remnant regulator and is clearly the result of factors other than the regulator. If the flushing effect of floodwaters could prevent the build up of weed in the bay the remnant regulator would have been helpful. But the RLCAG is making the opposite claim, viz that **because** of the remaining regulator bank, “*---flood water cannot flush Clayton Bay*”, (with the weed build up the result).

It can be clearly seen from Photos 2 and 3 that the RLCAG’s attempt to blame the regulator for the weed build up cannot be sustained; their arguments are clearly false - the deflecting influence of the regulator remnant in fact **enhances** the flushing of the bay at Clayton Bay and this can be clearly seen from the cliff top above the channel from where the ‘log’ observations were made.

Thus the reality is the very opposite to what they are asking people to believe, and the reality does **not** support the RLCAG’s opposition to the regulator.

The RLCAG, was “*formed in January 2007 with the specific purpose of opposing the proposed weir at Wellington ---*” (RLCAG website – home page), and as evidenced by their initial “Stop Rann’s Weir” campaign, this group has been from the outset in strident political opposition to the SA Government’s use of weirs and regulators as a drought management strategy in the Lower Lakes. In summarising their message they write, “*The problem is over-allocation – Stop blaming the drought*”. (RLCAG website – home page).

But the data is overwhelmingly clear – in the most extreme drought on record the over-allocation issue became almost irrelevant as the irrigators themselves were deprived of water, the barrages kept tidal pressures unnaturally at bay and the Lower Lakes were allowed to fall below sea level for the first time ever – with huge environmental, social and economic costs.

In such circumstances it is critical that the community is accurately informed and that opinions are based upon the facts – but the example above shows how readily the reality can be ‘bent’ to **appear** to support opinions promoted by a group whose position is in reality **untenable** when all the relevant facts are considered.

**A valid opinion should be based upon and have nothing to fear from a fair and unbiased treatment of the relevant facts.**

The example documented in this paper shows that in this instance at least, the RLCAG, in an apparent attempt to promote support for its opposition to the Clayton Bay regulator, has misrepresented the facts of the matter in a way which gives rise to concern about their treatment of other information which may arise and which might also not support their position.

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