

Insights into river at forum

Louis Harrison

THE third biannual River People’s Forum was attended by about 150 traditional owners, community members, experts and managers at Swan Hill’s Lower Murray Inn.

Speakers came together to discuss conservation ideas, river action, and overall river sustainability.

Swan Hill Sustainability Group member Nicole presented at the forum on 19 June, providing historical context about the river flows in the region and how drastically different they are today.

“Prior to the mid 90s, water regularly flowed between 20-25,000ML/day at Swan Hill, spilling onto the floodplain downstream of Swan Hill, during the seasonally appropriate time, between winter and early summer,” she said.

“River data freely available and lived experience shows these flows were commonplace prior to the millennium drought.”

South Australian Commissioner for the River Murray Dr Emma Carmody and Professor Quentin Grafton, Australian National University, delivered a speech in the morning about potential “system risks” leading into the next Basin Plan.

“It is no mistake that the Lower Murray was listed as Critically Endangered under the Federal Environmental Protection Biodiversity Protection Act this year and it would be a profound act of cognitive dissonance to list this ecological community (and Ramsar site) on the one hand but to fail to do what’s necessary under the Water Act and Basin Plan on the other hand,” Dr Carmody said.

Part of the forum also included information about a river flow trial supported by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder in 2021.

Former environmental water manager, Terry Korodaj, worked on the coordinated flow



trial and said it had benefits for water bodies and animals following “years of dry conditions”.

“It also showed the benefits and willingness of communities working together with NSW, Victorian and Commonwealth water agencies,” he said.

South Australians from the Murray Mouth region also attended the event to gain clarity on what discussions and solutions were looking like upstream as the situation in the Corong continues to worsen.

“The Murray River is a living body, and the mouth of any river is so significant, it’s imperative that it gets water,” south coast resident

Deirdre Nieuwnhuis said.

“Only a third of the flows are coming down the river, so the barrages have to be in place at Goolwa to keep the salinity out, because otherwise the sea would come rushing back up the river.

“Environmental flows from upstream are not just for the benefit of the lower end, it serves many purposes as it goes all the way along the river.

“The Murray has to flow as a river if it is going to stay viable and help everyone, to manage salinity, water quality, fish breeding, enable other ecosystems to thrive, and to prevent algal blooms and blackwater.”

Decision makers, experts, advocates and community gathered on the Murray to discuss river flows. Picture: Supplied



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More Australians are choosing life beyond the big cities

Australians are moving to regional communities in record numbers , with new data showing the shift away from capital cities continues to gather pace.

The latest Regional Movers Index found the number of people moving from capital cities to regional Australia reached its highest level since the index began. In the March 2026 quarter, people moving to the regions outnumbered those heading back to the cities by almost 30 per cent.

Regional Australia Institute chief executive Liz Ritchie said the result reflected the growing appeal of regional living.

“This is the highest level of capital to regional movement the RMI has ever recorded,” she said. “Australians are continuing to choose regional life in greater numbers, even as economic conditions shift.”

While Sydney and Melbourne continue to account for most people leaving capital cities, the trend is becoming more widespread, with increasing numbers of movers also coming from Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide.

The Sunshine Coast remained the most popular destination for city movers, while Greater Geelong, Fraser Coast, Moorabool and Lake Macquarie were also among the leading destinations.

The data also shows growth is spreading beyond established regional hotspots.

Toowoomba recorded the strongest year-on-year increase in people moving from capital cities of any local government area in Australia. Other locations attracting growing numbers of residents included Broome, Townsville and the Mid-Coast region of New South Wales.

Ritchie said the data helps identify emerging growth areas and gives communities an opportunity to plan for future housing, infrastructure and services.

For regional businesses, population growth can create new opportunities as communities expand and local economies grow.

Read the full story at CommBank Newsroom.

