

To The Murray-Darling  
Basin Royal Commission

Margy Cambling

Dear Sir,

My home is on the southerly shore of Lake Albert. I have immense respect for the environment. The drought years were incredibly awful to experience, and hopefully never to occur again.

Enclose is an account of some of that experience.

Since then this area has new challenges, the New Zealand Fur Seals have had a huge impact on the fishing industry. The banks consider this area as "high risk" and require a larger deposit for loans. Businesses are hesitant to invest until the health of the lake is secured. And now there is a possibility of poisoning the whole Basin with millions of tonnes of dead, rotting European Carp.

To have to fight to protect our environment is an utter disgrace to the other states and an insult to Australia's international agreement and the Australian Constitution

I wish the Commissioner all the best in an endeavour to secure a ~~per~~ positive and long lasting agreement for a health river system for everyone.

Yours Sincerely  
Margy Cambling

## Margaret Gambling

As I walked down the hill, wiping tears away, I felt intense anger and sadness. With the rope in my hand I climbed the ladder; all this did was give me a bigger picture, a better view of the Bay.

There is the post that the young children were not allowed to swim past as the water was too deep; they called it, "Pelican Poo Post. At its base, the intake to the windmill is now sticking out of the mud.

There, to the left, is the island of reeds where the black swans once nested, now it is just a patch of greenery in the dry lake bed. The water is gone; the swans are gone, as have all the other birds, fish, frogs, yabbies, and water rats. Previous declining water level contours are defined by an assortment of bottles and dead mussel shells glistening in the sun and the rusty coloured slime that indicates an acidic sulphate reaction.

The faintest of baby breath of a breeze plays with the leaves of the trees, yet not enough to cause the blades of the windmill to turn, -- not enough to deter me from the task ahead.

I looped the rope through and around the blades several times.

A now familiar tight band of pain around my chest intensifies.

I finished with an assortment of untidy knots.

This is one of the worst experiences of my life. The windmill is now secured, tied up, no longer of use, for now, for how long? How did this come about?

How did I allow it to get to this? What was I able to do to stop this sin against Nature, this sin against the Environment?

. This is not a Natural Disaster, as in drought. This is a National disgrace!!! A sin against Nature

I know I will never be the same person again, I feel a coldness down my spine, a tightness in my jaw, shaking legs as I step down the ladder, I make my way up the hill, back to the house, not looking back, not even once.

It is not just hope that is, now, being challenged. It is the mateship that is exemplified by the Anzacs, the neighbourly hand that was always extended to everyone in need, it is the essence of the community that I grew up in, and it is the world as I knew. It's a look into a future that focuses on greed and money, raping and killing the world that we all live in. To accept and allow this to happen is not ever considered, not for the Coorong, Lake Alexandrina, or Lake Albert, or for that matter not for us. It may be a lack of understanding of what has happened, so, to present the situation from my prospective, is a beginning.

It was the Autumn of 1998 when we planted the olive trees, approx. 1300 of them, all correctly spaced and staked up straight, in neat lines. The Orchard was the dream of my husband and myself, the 100 acre block of land next to us came on the market, Butch offered his price, it was accepted and planning began.

This was a very busy and exciting time for us, we had just started the earthworks for our much awaited new home, the two youngest children, Kate and Tom at 5 and 3 years old where allowing me more time for working beside Butch, digging the foundation, setting up the forming and plumbing.

The foundations of the house were finally poured.

Butch died in a car accident that night.

With the help and guidance of great friends and family the house was finally finished, and my focus was now directed to our future financial security, the olive orchard.

It was the Autumn of 1998 when we planted the olive trees, approx. 1300 of them, all correctly spaced out in neat straight lines, staked and tied with the dripper line lying beside them. The irrigation water was from Lake Albert, the water license of 20ML [20,000 KLs], was my inheritance from my family. The salt content of the water was at 1800 EC unit, the salt tolerance of olive trees up to 2,400 EC units, my Dad had done years of water testing in the Lake and in his experience the water never got that salty. I struggled with the learning that had to be done with the irrigation, pumps, and motors, the filter system and release valves and eventually, all the work that was required to install the most efficient irrigation system was in place, all the dripper lines ready to go.

Looking back I am amazed at the enthusiasm, energy, joy and love I had then. I was awake with the first birdcall, I was able to get a couple of hours working in the orchard before Kate and Tom had to be woken up, given breakfast, and helped get ready for school. At 8.30 am they were picked up by the school bus, and I was back out in the olive orchard, weeding, pruning or retying the trees, the school bus returning indicating it was time to go back to the house, back to Kate and Tom.

The trees struggled to survive, already having to grow past the requirements of Quarantine, now it was snails, hail, scale, and rising salt. To help supplement my income I worked with my dear old friend Tom "Dooley" Hardy supplying fire wood to local businesses and families, its hard work yet between Tom Hardy and myself, we worked it out, I sharpen and started his chainsaw for him, we cut and loaded the wood together. He was a great support and company for me, Kate and Tom worried about me being out there by myself.

With the rising cost of living I expanded my occasional house cleaning, accepting more jobs, doing more hours, selling shares when I couldn't cover costs, the olive trees so slow, the shares are dwindling much faster than I expected.

Invest in some land for future development, this is an awesome community/area to live in, development always follows the water, look at Millang, the biggest growth for the whole state, Meningie will follow.

As the years passed, as the workload increased and the cost of living continued to rise, the energy I had slowly wanes, I struggle to maintain any semblance of control of the weeds on the property, barely maintaining the roadsides, thank heavens for my brothers, s support, they have the knowledge and equipment and spray them.

As the seasons passed the water was not always available, and now the foot valve for the irrigation pump needs to be extended, only a temporary measure, of course, to get it through this dry summer.

The olive trees were very severely pruned, I am unable to find the energy to stop it. The trees are slow to recover, and the salt content in the water now detrimental to their growth, the Murray Mouth is starting to close up, I stop irrigating, leave the water for the environment, and leave the trees to Mother Nature.

It's time to set up the sub-division of the blocks, ~~finally~~, I bring together all the accumulated information that I have been gathering. The plans are drawn with many changes required from the local council, each time resulting in the loss of another title. The interest comes from as far as Sydney, and as the civil works will only commence on the sale of some of the blocks I approach the bank for financial backing to help pay the difference, I now have my first overdraft!

The olive trees are showing signs of progress , Kate and Tom are growing up, and I now have an exceptionally special person in my life, Ray is a self-funded retiree, his knowledge of sprays ,farming practices, farming equipment, and common sense is amazing , and the olive trees start to thrive,

One block of land is under contract and another to be signed up, there is positive interest from as far away as Sydney ,that same week, I hear about a meeting , in regard to a temporary weir to be built at Pomanda Point ,just south of Wellington ,where the Murray River enters Lake Alexandrina .WHAT WIER, Why?? Karlene Maywaid the Minister for Water presented the local community the Governments proposal to dump thousands of tonnes of rock and rubble into the Lake ,to hold back the water to guarantee enough water for "Critical Human Needs". Work on the access roads had to commence as soon as possible, and, of course , this is all just temporary, while the drought lasts. The contract for the block of land does not go through, and all prospective buyers disappear faster than the water

Meanwhile the newspapers are continually reporting on extending irrigation in the upper reaches of the Paroo and Warrago River ,both upper tributaries to the Murray Darling Basin , increasing water licenses in the Eastern States ,and the illegal withholding of water. Finally Adelaide starts water restrictions for residential use, with an incredible amount of complaint.

The drought continues, Lake Albert is receding fast ,even though we extended the intake of the windmill, now our only means of pumping water from the Lake, the water is not always there, and when it is it's now,so salty that it is undrinkable to the sheep, all but the ewes with lambs are sold, the ducks and turkey are killed and frozen, and the chooks are given away. As the only other source of water on the property is the rainwater tank , we share this with the remaining sheep, spray for the olive orchard, and the barest minimum for some vegetables in the garden, just to supplement the washing water. Our personal requirements are minimal- I wash myself most often from 1/2 a bucket of warm water, showers are only when my hair needs to be washed, and most of my toilet requirement needs are done outside. The native trees around the house are showing signs of distress and it's too much for a lot of them, it saddened me to see them die but the effect of all this on the children saddened me even more! With the bushfires in Victoria I realize how vulnerable we are now that we can no longer protect ourselves from bushfires, we spend many hours cleaning up all the dead wood.

To walk around the community was to hear, see and feel the grave concerns of others , young and old, depression is contagious .As the close community we are we keep a sharp alert out for each other. The stress and tension in the voices heard at the many meeting was felt and shared by all. I made many phone calls, sent faxes and letters to relevant government departments, the responds were patronizing, passed on and/or totally beyond their understanding and/or their ability to help. The information that we did gather ,either by searching the internet, phone calls and meeting, always constantly seeking the truth and hearing the contradictions added to our unrest and lack of confidence. in Government Depts

On New Year's day '08 Ray, Tom and myself had returned from a magical evening camping by the Coorong to see, for the first time, the Bay totally without water . My son stood beside me as the immense sadness of what we were looking at seeped in, Tom asked me to please not cry as the tears slid down his face

I heard there were earthworks happening at Narrung, the Government has started to build a temporary earth embankment at the Narrows, between the two Lakes. The reasoning is to stop the acidic sulphate in Lake Albert. The excavators and trucks were everywhere, tonnes of soil dumped into the Lake ,black mud oozing up to the surface ,and sheet piling that looks anything but temporary. The noise and destruction of this normally peaceful place is too much for my senses and I feel a tight band of pain around my chest and the tears of sadness and anger cannot be held in any longer.



To add more insult ,huge, noisy pumps were installed, working day and night to maintain a level of water in Lake Albert keeping it from total environmental collapse, We are told that it's all because of the drought ,then in conversations with others ,some whom have followed the waters North in a small plane , and reading different newspapers, I hear another side to the situation ,huge storage dams ,miles of earth embankments directing the water away from its natural flow. Now all this waste of money and energy to build a bung because the States that share the Murray Darling Basin were holding back too much water. Later another 'bung' was built at Clayton, water was pumped into the Goolwa Channel to the depth of .75 AHD to keep the more numerous and affluent population, with their boats happy.

The farmers on the Narrung Peninsular are extremely busy carting water for their stock, dairies are closing down, families are leaving the district, a water mains is being laid from Talliem Bend to supply water to the area, to replace what had been taken away, of course this water comes with a price per KL while I cannot even see my 'asset' let alone access it and even if I could 'the quality of the water is heaps too salty to be of any use!!! Another account to place on the expanding pile!!!!

I submit my Water License for one of the Government Buy back Tenders, the price I enter is that of the previous year, \$2,400 per ML, this would have been put towards my ever increasing bank overdraft, the tender was declined as it did not "represent acceptable value for money" And this was about the same time that the Government set up the subsidies to insulate homes, I ponder what the "Government " does value!!!!

In regard to health issues that were affecting people of the community e.g., respiratory problems, headaches, infected sinus, asthma, heart complaints and sore eyes, the advice from the Principal Scientific Officer of SA Health was to -avoid outdoor activity, avoid vigorous exercise, stay indoors with windows and doors closed, because prolonged exposure to airborne dust can lead to chronic breathing and lung problems, and possible heart disease , we are farmers, how are we meant to do our work????????

I manage to work in the demolition and building industry , this is work that takes me away from my home, I feel like an exile , my children live with their older siblings and go to different schools, the best aspect is that I can put my head in the sand and don't see the Lake dying every morning that I wake up.. The work is hard and hot ,the days are long, we are out at Wommerra in areas that not many people have access to, the pipes from the Murray River find their way up here, most of the joins are leaking so badly that the sheep have permanent water sources, and by the green areas around them ,these leaks have been happening for years. We hear of good rains down South  
And On the way home I look forward to a replenished Lake Albert only to drive over Albert Hill and witness the dust storm blowing across the dry Lake beds by Lake Albert Station, Ray 's concern for me is evident in his questioning, I attempt to explain to him this reoccurring pain band around my chest,

I heard about drought assistance and made an appointment at the closest office, Murray Bridge, the person there was as helpful as possible yet there was nothing he could help me with because not all of my income was primary production, Kate and Tom's Student allowance was stopped, and he passed my name and phone number on to a church based charity, and now on top of all the other extra expenses, as well as bank interest rising, the extra costs to send Tom to another school, Kate at university, and ,an Orthodontist account ( and no, it was not cosmetic surgery, it was very necessary!!!) all add up and the overdraft at the bank needs to be extended again, and I wonder how long can I remain hopeful, how long can this last.

Ray and I have been doing acidic sulphate tests here for the CSIRO, the Lake has been getting more acidic ,salty and smelly, there are times that the south westerly breeze brings with it the foul smell of rotten eggs , and even though the day is hot and humid it is necessary to close all the doors and windows, and we don't have air-conditioning , this is our last choice!! This is what it has come down to, this is all that we can do!!

—I vividly remember when the drought broke- I was out at the clothesline, gathering some pegs, big fat drops of rain started to fall, gradually getting bigger, I stood still, smelling the moisture,



feeling the relief from the trees around me, the tears pouring down my face and the tension that I didn't even know I was holding, slid down my shoulders, surely now the environment will show signs of recovery. The next acidic sulphate test that we did the results were higher and the water was 40,000 EC Units (sea water varies between 30,000 and 60,000 EC Units) and the seepage that are the result of the rains are 120,000 EC Units, it seems that we still have a long way to go!!!!

I am given the opportunity to travel up the rivers, first the Murray then the Darling and the Warrago, the water from the heavy rains up north are starting to come down, my soul gives a huge sigh of relief!!!! To be able to swim in clean water is totally soothing, to see the water flow once again is awesome. Just south of Burke, an enormous earth embankment followed the road for miles and miles, when there was an entrance to the property we asked permission to enter. The view from the top of the embankment was of huge manmade drains that stretched to the horizon, water beiching out of pipes their diameter measured in meters, baby fish floating, dying, and thousands of hectares ready to be sown, the For Sale sign on the gate. All this belonged to an overseas company, have they finished raping the environment and are now "jumping ship"??? And the flood that can 'save' the River system is being sucked up as quickly as possible, I hope they don't take it all, I hope the rains continue.

On returning home I rejoice at seeing some water in the Bay, there have been good rains and at this stage anything is better than nothing, great to see some birds return even if they are the species that live in salt water.

With new energy I get back to work, start making lists – more cleaning jobs to do, hay bales to put in the shed, check the few sheep and cows, work to do in the orchard, always bills to pay and always weed control, I receive a letter from the Dept. of Weeds.. "Boxthorn and horehound on 'your' roadside have to be removed in two weeks, if not, they will do it and charge me." So this job is moved up the list. Mend the jeans, socks and work gloves, plant more vegetables, phonecalls to make, ATO- Extend repayments, Land Tax dept, Local Council, sorry can't afford to pay rates, and I notice they have all increased, again!!!! Make an appointment to the bank manager to extend the overdraft once again.

The long awaited plan to have one body of authority in control of the Murray Darling Basin is happening. There are more meetings, newsletters and proposals to read, the reports on the TV news show angry, threatening farmers burning the Basin proposals, I know how they feel, their financial security may be threatened, yet, just wait till their environment around them starts to die.



### Declaration of the four sacred things.

The earth is a living conscious being. In company with cultures of many different times and places we name these things as sacred:

Air, Fire, Water and Earth.

Whether we see them as the breath, energy, blood and body **of** the mother; or as the blessed gifts of a creator, or as symbols of the interconnected systems that sustain life, we know that nothing can live without them. To call these things sacred is to say that they, themselves, become the standard by which our acts, our economics, our laws and our purposes must be judged.

No one has the right to appropriate them or profit from them at the expense of others. Any government that fails to protect them forfeits its legitimacy. All people, all living things are part of the earth life and so, are sacred. No one of us stands higher or lowers than any other. Only justice can assure balance, only ecological balance can sustain freedom. Only in freedom can that fifth sacred, thing called spirit flourish in its full diversity. To honour it is to create conditions in which nourishment, sustenance, habitat, knowledge, freedom and beauty can thrive.

To honour the sacred is to make love possible. To this we dedicate our curiosity, our will, our courage, our silences and our voices.

To this we dedicate our lives.

Taken from the beginning of  
"The fifth sacred thing"

by Starhawk