

Dung beetles ate our climate-history!

Or “Droughts and Extreme Weather are Nothing New.”

by Dr Bill Johnson

Outpourings of climate bulldust over recent decades have been more alarming than changes in the climate.

Drought and above-average temperatures during recent El Niño-dominated years from 2001 to 2010 were deliberately and relentlessly marketed as global-warming. Driven incestuously by WWF and its Wentworth Group; green groups; Climate Commissioners; and a bunch of pretend-institutes, superlatives flew-up every greasy-pole out through talking-heads into the community’s ear.

Australians endured an endless chatter-based marketing campaign involving the ABC, CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology that intertwined CO₂; the hot/critical decade; Murray-Darling Basin (MDB) “health”; and the carbon tax; grinding them into our national psyche. Science was reorganised with rivers of tax-payers cash enticing once-proud universities to lend brand to the cause. Every hot/cold/dry/wet day, clamouring professors popped out of disused broom-cupboards across the land, waving models and “new reports”. It was an overt scientifically-disingenuous beat-up.

When CO₂ was just a pup, another cluster of El Niño years from 1895 to 1903 caused the most intense Australia-wide drought in our post-European history. Most of the country experienced between 7 and 9 relentlessly dry-years in a row.

The decade from 1890 was remarkable also for its number of extreme and damaging events: brief floods, cyclones, hurricanes, gales, hailstorms and snowstorms, and extended periods of exceptional heat. The Antarctic ice-shelf also broke-up, endangering southern sea-lanes; altering ocean currents and disturbing climates around the world.

Heatwaves were endemic; wildfires raged. Inland shade-temperatures repeatedly hovered around 40 to 50°C for weeks; 40°C was not uncommon along our coasts.

Drought killed some 50 million sheep (50% of the national flock); 5 million cattle (40% of the national herd), and tens-of-thousands of horses. By 1902, the MDB’s driest rainfall-year since 1900, major rivers ceased-to-flow.

The Darling was dry at Menindee for 364 days, its “health” extinct. Across the country, grass turned to dust. Shifting sands filled dams, blocked dry-creeks; buried fences and roads. Depression was endemic; families walked away from farms devastated and broken. Iconic poems and ballads were penned. Stories in newspapers and reports of the day told of intense suffering. Australia’s economy was badly hit; unemployment was rife.

From the late 1800’s until an abrupt and well-known climate-shift in 1947, rainfall across Australia was drier generally than since that time.

Ignoring smaller droughts, from 1939 culminating with the 1947 shift; widespread drought and heat enveloped the countryside again. Temperature records were again broken; millions of sheep and cattle again died. BoM data for the MDB shows its driest 5 to 15 years (since 1900) ended between 1944 and 1947.

By 1945 Hume Dam (built in 1936) was empty; Burrinjuck (1927) almost so. The Namoi stopped flowing at Gunnedah and other major NSW rivers, the Castlereagh, Macquarie and Lachlan were out of water; again.

By April, Victoria's then-main storages, Coliban, Lake Lonsdale, Pykes Creek, Melton, Eildon, Waranga and Laanecoorie were also empty. Cars parked on the bed of Eildon 25 metres below its then top-water. Lake Wendouree was a puddle.

Flows in the upper-Murray, Kiewa and Mitta Mitta Rivers, which drain the MDB's alpine-country, were the lowest recorded to that time. Near their sources, the Loddon stopped flowing; the King was dry and the Goulburn was a trickle. The Murray ceased flowing at Echuca. The Campaspie was dry there for 4-months. That briefly accounts for most major MDB donor-rivers, and from one end to the other, the "food-bowl" was again desolate, eroded, empty, burnt-out and by any measure, "health"-less.

By August 1940, Sydney's Nepean Dam was also empty; Cataract was dangerously low. In 1942, Sydney's water-quota was reduced from 100 to 70 litres per household per day. By December 1944, along most of its length the Hunter River ceased to flow. By January 1945, the Hawkesbury was dry at north-Richmond; and other coastal rivers including the Tweed were fast drying-up. Other States fared little better.

Drought is never pretty close-up. But during the recent drought while television audiences watched commentators watching farmers watch paddocks shrivel and their livestock die, dropping-in key-words like global-warming and deliberately stirring fear; water flowed continuously down the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Darling Rivers, to provide wildlife refuge and feed the carp in South Australia's Coorong.

Deluded and intoxicated by hyperventilating professors like Richard Kingston, urban people had little idea of the angst that caused for water-dependent rural communities.

Dams are meant to empty. The engineers of the past who, with imperfect knowledge and without computers designed the schemes that worked so well near their design-limits received no CSIRO medals or cosy professorships. The Wentworth Group, ACF and other disciples, framed farmers as "environmental villains" but it wasn't they who stopped the rain. When drought spectacularly ended, red-faced Climate Commissioners, economists and politicians simply switched the mantra. It rattles-on today as "climate-change".

It has been a clever trick; a contrived-illusion. Now, some 5-years later, as wheels fall-off the band-wagon and professors like David Karoly, John Quiggin, Michael Brown, Lesley Hughes and Ian Lowe desperately paste over the cracks; pennies are dropping that all is not well. This brief review shows that climate changes and CO₂ are unrelated. Irrespective of wind-turbines and solar panels, abrupt changes will continue into the future. That's how the climate works.

Chattering-professors and many commentators carefully skirt the nub of the climate-science issue; which is the transference of scant data (or none at all) to models; with the modelled outputs revered as holy writ. Science-bias, bullying and censorship is rife. Data contradictory to the cause, like used here from various official sources have been forgotten; sidelined as irrelevant. Cold days are called weather; hot ones, warming. It's bizarre that it's taken so long for trust in virtual-science to unravel.

Our Nation's science-systems are broken and corrupted. Joined by their wallets and talking-heads they've become agenda-driven, spruikish and untrustworthy. A broad-based enquiry into climate science and its advocacy is long overdue.

A pragmatic case should also be put to harvest more peak-flows and floods as insurance against inevitable future droughts. To build-on what we have; and instead of spending billions of dollars to irrigate the Southern Ocean, return efficiency dividends to Basin communities so they can prosper, grow and produce food, more efficiently into the future.

Malcolm Turnbull's WWF-Murray-Darling Plan is a science-travesty.

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He has a particular interest in landscape management effects on water-yielding catchments in the southern medium rainfall (450 - 700 mm) zone of the Basin. He has prepared a detailed (personal) submission to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, but it was ignored. The current Basin Plan was shoved through on the back of dubious science.

Main sources for the above paper:

Foley JC (1957). *"Droughts in Australia. Review of records from Earliest Years of Settlement to 1955"*. **Bureau of Meteorology Bulletin 43.**

Crabb P (1997). *"Murray-Darling Basin Resources"*. **Murray-Darling Basin Commission, Canberra.**

I also checked/gathered specific information (especially meteorological events (including Antarctic ice-break-up) between 1896 to 1905) against newspaper reports using the TROVE database (National Library of Australia).