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Murray over allocation dismissed

By Peta Martin and James Hancock

Water Minister dismisses irrigator group's call to address an over allocation of South Australia's Murray water take.

In 2011 Chair of South Australian Murray Irrigators (SAMI), Caren Martin, called for the State Water Minister to address a discrepancy between the amounts of water sold in South Australian Murray water entitlements and the amount of water that the State has agreed it will use with upstream states.

The discrepancy accounts for 68 gigalitres of water and SAMI believes that to account for the over allocation of water all users will need to have their shares in water devalued.

However Minister Caica has dismissed the concern saying South Australian Murray users never use all of their entitlements so the miscalculation will not upset the current balance.

"Our cap has never been breached and has never been broken at all.

"But in the mid 1990s there was a cap policy that was developed.

"South Australia's irrigators historically used about 80 per cent of their entitlement so there was a mechanism by which more people could be brought into the industry by allocating beyond your cap but the point is that that cap has never been breached."

Minister Caica says that the over allocation comes as a result of South Australian irrigators efficiencies.

"In fact we still don't breach our cap with those extra entrants in there.

"That was a decision that was made, as I understand it to recognise South Australia's conservative within what was its cap entitlements."

Minister Caica says that only if all of the State's water users decided to use their full entitlement then the South Australian Government would put some measures in place.

"If indeed it was to occur that every one of those people that have entitlements used their full amount of water, well the State Government would be required to make sure that we didn't breach our cap.

"But that hasn't been the situation and I can't see that being the situation in the foreseeable future at all."

South Australian Murray Irrigators view remains that in the current climate of Murray Darling Basin policy



(Peta Martin, ABC Riverland - ABC Local)

planning water security, or guaranteed Murray water entitlements, is becoming increasingly important.

With Ms Martin saying, "I've been told by several bureaucrats that our historic use of take compared to actual entitled volume has been around the 67 per cent mark.

"So there's a little bit of change in the system, 33 per cent.

"Now the problem is when everybody uses their full entitlement and that 33 per cent of change is not there anymore.

"In current trade scenarios people should be entitled to do that in a highly secured environment."

SAMI still hope the issue will be addressed at a state level as Ms Martin says guaranteed water is crucial for irrigation business confidence and success.

"The question I have for the [Water] Minister is 'what is the minimum flow that has to come over the boarder so that I can guarantee myself 100 per cent of my entitlement, in volumetric terms, so that I can then plan that for the business that I am investing in?'"



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