

# Open Letter on Murray-Darling Basin Floodplain Harvesting in NSW

## Dear The Hon Niall Blair MLC

NSW Minister for Regional Water

Huge amounts of water are being harvested from the floodplain in the Northern Murray-Darling Basin. The NSW Government admits this has increased significantly in recent years.

Floodplain harvesting has major economic, social and environmental impacts throughout the Basin. Australia Institute research shows it has contributed to reduced flows in the Barwon-Darling/Baaka, contributing to the Menindee fish kills and town water crises. It impacts Aboriginal people, floodplain graziers, downstream communities and irrigators and the environment.

To date, floodplain harvesting has been unregulated and not even monitored or measured.

The NSW Government proposes to issue free licences to return floodplain harvesting back to a historic level, but will not provide evidence of what that historic level is. At the same time, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority proposes to increase the legal limit of water diversions by the new NSW licence volumes.

The floodplain harvesting licences will be compensable, even though the wider policy is inconsistent with Federal and State legislation. This exposes governments and taxpayers to risks of compensation and legal challenges.

Regulating floodplain harvesting is crucial, but the current proposals for regulation and monitoring will make the problem worse. The NSW Government even proposes self-reporting of measurements taken with a dipstick.

This is medieval technology trying to regulate 21st century agribusiness.

This is just the latest example of repeated failure of water agencies at both federal and state level to manage our water in an equitable, transparent and credible way. This repeated failure by governments is jeopardising the social licence of the entire irrigation industry.

**We urge you to immediately halt floodplain harvesting licences until a credible, modern and evidence-based system is in place.**

### SIGNATORIES —

**David Papps**

Former Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder

**Terry Korn**

President, Australian Floodplain Association

**Chick Olsson**

Director, Australian Wool Growers Association

**Phil O'Connor**

Mayor, Brewarrina Shire Council

**Darriea Turley**

Mayor, City of Broken Hill

**Ken Ross**

Acting General Manager, Wentworth Shire Council

**Kevin Stacey**

Convenor, Broken Hill and Menindee Lakes: We Want Action

**Darren Clifton**

Secretary, Darling River Action Group

**Melissa Gray**

Convenor, Healthy Rivers Dubbo

**Badger Bates**

Barkandji Elder

**Fred Hooper**

Chair, Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations

**Will Mooney**

Executive Officer, Murray Lower Darling Indigenous Nations

**Beverley Smiles**

President, Inland Rivers Network

**Ed Fessey**

Chair, Lower Balonne Floodplain Association

**Garry Hall**

President, Macquarie Marshes Environmental Landholders Association

**Kate Smolski**

Chief Executive Officer, Nature Conservation Council of NSW

**Anne Dickson**

President, National Parks Association of NSW

**Paul Pierotti**

Vice President and Water Spokesperson, Griffith Business Chamber

**Chris Brooks**

Chair, Southern Riverina Irrigators

**Caren Martin**

Chair, South Australian Murray Irrigators

**Alan Whyte**

Chair, South West Water Users

**Professor John Quiggin**

Professor, School of Economics University of Queensland

**Jonathan La Nauze**

Chief Executive Officer, Environment Victoria

**John Pettigrew**

Spokesperson for Water Resources, Environmental Farmers Network

**Shelley Scoullar**

Chair, Speak Up

**Ben Oquist**

Executive Director, The Australia Institute

**Rob McBride**

Tolarno Station

The **Australia Institute**

Research that matters.