

## New South Wales irrigators in the clear after watchdog finds no evidence of illegal pumping

NSW Country Hour By [Lara Webster](#)

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[NRAR has cleared Namoi Valley irrigators of any wrongdoing.](#) (AAP: Dean Lewins)

**The Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) has cleared New South Wales irrigators who were accused of illegal pumping during an embargo that was put in place after recent rain.**

A week ago the water watchdog was informed about a number of instances where landholders in the Namoi Valley had pumped water out of the river as the first flush came down.

This was alleged to have occurred despite a voluntary pumping embargo being issued by the area's industry group for irrigated agriculture, Namoi Water.

### Key points:

- Watchdog clears irrigators in the Namoi Valley accused of pumping water during an embargo
- Irrigators group "not surprised" by finding, says claims caused "negative social media event"

A subsequent embargo was also placed on pumping by the NSW Government.

- Watchdog says it will work with WaterNSW to better inform irrigators of embargoes

However, NRAR chief investigator Grant Barnes said their initial investigations had not identified any breaches, and found people had acted in accordance with their licence conditions.

The watchdog deployed staff to the Namoi and Macquarie rivers to check in with landholders and water users about their knowledge of the embargo and their compliance with the restrictions.

"My staff advised of no breaches of the embargo had been detected," Mr Barnes said.

NRAR is still investigating one complaint alleging breaches of the embargo, but said so far no evidence has been found that is the case.

The watchdog added that any pumping that has been detected during the embargo was for critical human needs, as well as stock and domestic licence holders, which is permitted.

## 'No surprise to me'

Namoi Water said its members have been vindicated after NRAR's initial investigation.

The body's Executive Officer, Jon Maree Baker, said the results of the investigation were no surprise to her, but added that the allegation had a negative impact on irrigators.

"We're very pleased to see Grant Barnes come out and make the statement that there has been no pumping or breaches during the embargo," Ms Baker said.

"The issue of social media associated with the allegation that was made — one allegation was reported — resulted in quite a substantial negative social media event.

"In this case the issue should have really been a good news story for Namoi irrigators who did undertake a voluntary embargo.

## Communication an issue

Since the allegations of illegal pumping were made, Namoi Water has maintained the claims were unfounded and that irrigators were never properly notified of the Government embargo.

At the time Ms Baker said there had never been an unregulated pumping embargo in the Namoi Valley before, and irrigators in the valley had not received formal notification.

While there were local radio announcements of the change and gazette made public on the WaterNSW website, Namoi Water said there was no other form of correspondence.

Mr Barnes said during NRAR's investigation, irrigators had expressed "displeasure" with the manner in which they were notified.

"That is something both my office and my colleagues in Department of Industry-Water will take on board," he said.

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