

*Submission: Senate Inquiry into the Provisions of the Water Act 2007*



Friends of the Earth believe that the *Water Act 2007* strikes a fair balance between delivering water for the environment and delivering water for irrigation. The Act should not be amended.

Excessive over-extraction from the Basin for irrigation purposes, over the last 50 years in particular, has led to massive environmental decline. River systems are now severely stressed, River Red Gum forests are dying, wetland ecosystems have been heavily modified, and native fish and other water-dependent species are in severe decline.

Therefore, the commitment in the *Water Act 2007* to reduce water extraction to sustainable levels and return water to the environment to promote ecosystem health is absolutely crucial. The *Water Act 2007* finally gives the environment an equal share when considering how the water resources of the Basin are allocated – it does not override socio-economic concerns, or mean that they can't be considered, but it fairly and squarely recognises that the environment must be given a decent share of the water if the economies that depend on it are to survive and thrive. There will not be a Basin economy if the rivers have been destroyed.

The *Water Act 2007* was developed and introduced for the express purpose of redressing the historical imbalance which led to the dramatic environmental decline of the last two decades. It is based on using the best available science to inform the development of sustainable diversion limits and to promote the conservation of key ecological assets. Any amendment to the Act which sought to achieve a different 'balance' between environmental and socio-economic concerns would undermine the scientific and objective process underpinning the Basin planning process, and would instead leave the future of the Murray-Darling Basin open to arbitrary and politically motivated decisions.

It is very apparent that healthy rivers are needed for healthy communities. The *Water Act 2007* provides an opportunity to finally move the Murray-Darling Basin onto a sustainable footing. Amending the Act to allow continued over-extraction from the Basin would destroy some of Australia's most precious freshwater ecological assets and deprive Basin communities of a secure long-term future.

The future of the Coorong and Lower Lakes, Barmah-Millewa, Macquarie Marshes, Gwydir Wetlands, Narran Lakes, Lowbidgee Floodplain, Chowilla Floodplain, Hattah Lakes, Menindee Lakes, Paroo, and Booligal wetlands and many, many others, all depend on the *Water Act 2007* remaining in its current form.

Similarly, the future of many of our most precious and iconic species, including the Murray Cod, Regent Parrot, Southern Bell Frog, Silver Perch, Great Egret, Blue-billed Duck, Straw-necked Ibis, Brolga, Moira Grass, Murray Crayfish and Long-necked Turtle all depend on the *Water Act 2007* and its proper implementation.