

Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Provisions of the Water Act 2007

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committees
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Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Sir,

Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Provisions of the Water Act 2007

I make this submission as a citizen of northern NSW, a life member of the National Parks Association of NSW, Armidale Branch, and a member Birds Australia Northern NSW and the Recovery Team for the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater. I have been actively involved in environmental conservation matters for more than 30 years, particularly in the catchment of the Gwydir River.

I am well aware of the problems of over-allocation in the Gwydir R catchment and elsewhere, leading to extensive degradation and loss of important wetlands and river health, because I have participated in efforts to develop the Murray Darling Cap and water management plans - plans which failed to address the over-allocation of water through existing irrigation licenses which were issued without consideration of environmental impacts.

The balance of water use in the Basin has been heavily weighted towards extraction for irrigation for too long, leading to highly stressed river systems. The *Water Act 2007* was introduced in order to address this imbalance and return water to the environment.

The *Water Act 2007* importantly recognises the need to return extraction to long-term sustainable levels and this must remain the focus of the Basin Plan.

It correctly prioritises the need to reduce water extraction and return water to the environment in order to support both the ecosystems and the communities that depend on them for an ecologically sustainable future.

The *Water Act 2007* correctly acknowledges the need to base decisions about sustainable water extraction levels on the best available science. The Guide to the Basin Plan has indeed assessed available science and presented a valuable guide to sustainable extraction levels, but unfortunately the Authority stuffed up the consultation process and provoked unwarranted hysterical and exaggerated opposition, fear and anxiety.

Calls to have socio-economic concerns take precedence over ecological sustainability are misguided. The only alternative to environmentally sustainable extraction levels is unsustainable extraction levels - which will ultimately have severe and irreversible socio-economic effects.

Any call to base decisions on a different 'balance' of social, environmental and economical considerations will rely on politics and not scientific understanding. Healthy rivers equal healthy communities, an outcome desired by all.

As a scientist and as a citizen of the Murray-Darling Basin I wish to stress that the *Water Act 2007* gets the balance right and does not need to be amended.

I call on members of the Senate Committee to recognise the overwhelming need to return extraction of water from the Murray Darling Basin to long-term sustainable levels.

End submission compiled by Beth Williams, Project Officer for Armidale Branch of the National Parks Association of NSW, member of Birds Australia Northern NSW and member of the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team.

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