



SC66/SC367

28 September 2023

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

Inquiry into the Water Amendment (Restoring our Rivers) Bill 2023.

The Murrumbidgee Council Local Government Area (LGA) in the Riverina region of south-western New South Wales, encompasses the towns of Coleambally, Darlington Point and Jerilderie. Our LGA covers an area of 6,680 square kilometres and works with a strong, cohesive community of approximately 3,566 people.

Our LGA is located within a rich and diverse agricultural area bordered by the Riverina and Murray regions, home of NSW's food bowl. The LGA is located between the fertile irrigation and river systems of the Riverina and the dryland agricultural area of the Hay Plains. Approximately 106,000 hectares of farming land is irrigated.

Agriculture is the primary driver of economic growth in Murrumbidgee Council, generating \$167.5M in 2021/2022. The industry is even more important from an employment perspective, with Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, making up over 45% of the employment in the LGA. However, our LGA and wider Western Riverina region has not, and possibly never will, recover from previous 'water buybacks' from our irrigators.

In relation to the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023*, Murrumbidgee Council strongly support the Basin Plan 2012, but not at the expense or the failing of our rural communities. Our Council support the changes that extend the deadline for compliance. Furthermore, Murrumbidgee Council support the ability for the States to identify and prioritise water saving infrastructure.

However, Murrumbidgee Council strongly oppose the voluntary or compulsory water buybacks at any time. Additionally, Council do not support the removal of the 1500gl cap on Commonwealth Government surface water purchases.



Finally, Murrumbidgee Council are opposed to amending the *Water Act 2007* and the implementation of the Basin Plan in full, including recovering 450gl of additional environmental water. The flow-on economic and social impacts from the reduction of available irrigation water allocation would be detrimental to our primary producers, their livelihoods and our communities.

Should you wish to further discuss our position of the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023*, or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

John Scarce
GENERAL MANAGER

