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Senate Legal and Constitutional Committees  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

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### *Senate Inquiry into the Provisions of the Water Act 2007*

The Nature Conservation Council NSW (NCC) is the peak Environmental Group in NSW representing over 100 organisations in advocating for the Environment. One of our concerns is the need to restore health to the tired and thirsty rivers and wetlands of the Murray-Darling Basin. We believe that the current Water Act 2007 has strong environmental provisions as it stands, which balances well the needs of the environment and the communities that depend on it. NCC is concerned that the proposals will weaken the Act. We submit that

- The *Water Act 2007* gets the balance right and does not need to be amended.
- The *Water Act 2007* importantly recognises the need to return extraction to long-term sustainable levels and this must remain the focus.
- The *Water Act 2007* 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.
- 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* correctly acknowledges the need to base decisions about sustainable water extraction levels on the best available science. Any call to base decisions on a different 'balance' of social, environmental and environmental considerations will rely on politics and not scientific understanding.
- Healthy rivers equal healthy communities.
- The only alternative to environmentally sustainable extraction levels is unsustainable extraction levels.

The rivers systems and wetlands of the Murray-Darling Basin are suffering after decades of over-allocation and over-extraction of water resources. We have already lost 90% of floodplain wetlands in the Basin, 80% of the waterbird populations that used to live there, 90% of native fish populations and 80% of our River Red Gum wetland forests.

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan is the best, and perhaps the last, opportunity we have to restore the health to the precious river and wetland systems of the Basin, which support us all.

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan process is set up through the *Water Act 2007*. This Senate Inquiry has been set up to investigate the Provisions of the *Water Act 2007*. The *Water Act 2007* was written, and passed, with the purpose of ensuring that extraction of water resources is returned to environmentally sustainable levels in order to protect, restore and provide for the ecological values and ecosystem services of the Murray-Darling Basin. We fully support this.

The Act provides broadly for the delivery of a Basin Plan that is environmentally sound and scientifically rigorous - something that is desperately, and urgently, needed.

We support the submissions made by our member and partner groups, in particular the Inland Rivers Network and hope that the voices for the environment are heard as part of this inquiry.

Yours faithfully

Prof Don White  
Chairperson