



Submission to the Senate Inquiry on Water Amendment (Purchase Limit Repeal) Bill 2019

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When the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement passed with bipartisan support in 2012 it was hailed as the greatest environmental policy in Australia's history. The plan was to restore the health of the Murray Darling river system by returning water to the rivers, allowing them to flow.

The recent fish kills in Menindee and scattered throughout the Basin have come as a shock to the public, while local communities have been crying for help for years. The community expected the \$13 billion investment was building long term health and resilience in the Basin. Instead in early January the country woke up to shocking scenes of millions of dead fish, an environmental disaster.

At the time the plan was drafted, the plan to recover 3,200 GL was a compromise for the environment, with science of the day recommending 4000 - 7000 GL needed to restore the Basin. In the context of the findings of the South Australian Royal commission and the catastrophe on the Darling River it's clear that much more need to be done if the Basin Plan is to succeed.

The key objective of the Basin Plan is to keep the rivers alive. If we are to do this we must be looking at all measures to strengthen the Basin Plan. This means prioritising methods that deliver real water to rivers.

Direct purchase of water licences is the most effective use of public funds to restore water for river.

Friends of the Earth did not support the May 2018 amendment to the Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) on the basis that construction of the supply measure projects presents great uncertainty. The risk to the environment and cultural heritage is high and the evidence that these projects will deliver the desired environmental outcomes is low.

We need mechanisms in place to deliver real water back to floodplains, lakes and wetlands should SDL supply measure projects fail to deliver environmental outcomes.

The cap on water buybacks is a restriction on rapidly and effectively returning real water to the rivers, which all communities depend on.

Friends of the Earth supports the repeal of the water buyback cap, and calls on the federal government to immediately begin purchasing water from willing participants and ensure this water is delivered to wetlands and floodplains.

The ecological crisis that is unfolding on the Darling is unprecedented and unnatural, and demands both an immediate and long-term response to protect the health of the river.

We all want life to continue in the Murray Darling Basin, from the insects to the irrigators - this is all dependent on restoring the health of the river, and getting the basin plan back on track.

There should be no cap placed on the health of the river, healthy rivers need water.
