

The Honourable Bill Heffernan, Senator for New South Wales.

Sir I recently returned to the Far West region of NSW and was shocked to see that the Darling River was not flowing at all in some towns (Wilcannia for example). Certainly the local aboriginal population who have for as long as I have known depended on this river to maintain aspects of their culture and lifestyle were lamenting its loss. Pastoralists in the region pointed the finger at the cotton growers and overall the increasing demand for water for irrigation in Queensland removing water from the Darling's intersecting streams combined with drought. I made an assumption that this could not be right as there are protected environmental flows so began to contact people such as Edwina Carter Department of Natural Resources Far West Region (Dubbo office) regarding water extraction regulations she explained the restrictions put on water extraction licence holders that protect these flows (so, no problem there). I then went on to speak to Mark Painting Acting- Director of Darling Basin/Murray/Murrumbidgee Region (Albury office). Mark suggested that it was a cumulative effect also of extraction and drought that was the reason the River was not flowing and had been in crisis for a long time.

A question often asked and comment commonly heard in this region is that you never hear about the crisis in the Darling reflected in popular media (yet the Murray is constantly under the spotlight). The profile of this region is so low and contains so few votes that this situation is obviously not newsworthy. How disillusioned people are when you discuss the most vital resource and significant landmark in their region withering into insignificance in the eyes of their parliamentarians.

Please can you let me know if there are plans to restore the Darling River, people understand the complexity of the situation with Queensland but cannot understand why the Darling is so undervalued as it is one of two iconic rivers in the state. What can local people do to raise the profile of this situation in the hope of responsive action.

Yours Sincerely,
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