

## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Enough: hurry up and regulate floodplain harvesting

**24/09/2021**

The NSW Parliament needs to get on with regulating floodplain harvesting as soon as possible.

“Claims floodplain harvesting is illegal have distracted and delayed regulation, leaving practice to continue unrestricted and unlimited for far too long,” said NSWIC CEO Claire Miller.

“Bret Walker SC, Sydney silk and Royal Commissioner, today said floodplain harvesting is crying out for regulation, and told the Upper House committee: ‘I do wish you’d hurry up’.

“We agree. Even though irrigators lose one-third of floodwater, this is in the public interest.

“Some big numbers have been bandied about this week, but let’s put them in perspective.”

Annual average current take in northern NSW is an estimates 350-390GL. Using the MDBA’s water balance tables underpinning the Basin Plan, that means floodplain harvesting in northern NSW amounts to just three per cent of the average 12,100GL of northern Basin inflows.

The licensed volume will be cut by about third. That means reducing floodplain harvesting take to about two per cent of northern Basin inflows.

“Three per cent down to two per cent, and more than 100GL returned to increase the undiverted 70 per cent portion of the pie for the environment. That’s what we are arguing about here,” Ms Miller said.

“Some have argued NSW should abandon the Cap and SDL processes agreed by all Basin State and the Commonwealth since 1995 and go it alone.

“Except it is not tenable to expect NSW to regulate only one form of take in only five valleys in this way but use a different metric for everything and everywhere else.

“If the SA Royal Commission is any guide, this approach applied across the board would mean at least another 1100 billion litres of water bought back in the southern Basin, on top of the 1700 billion litres already recovered from irrigators.

“This would kill the rice, dairy and cotton industries in southern valleys. Is that really the perverse outcome the Committee wants if it gives any weight to these arguments?”

Ms Miller said the focus now must turn to the policy merits.

“Floodplain harvesting is a sustainable form of water take, as it allows farmers to store water at times it is most abundant (i.e., during a flood), rather than only drawing from rivers.

“The reform to floodplain harvesting has been inundated by misinformation – including wild claims it causes rivers to run dry – but if we’ve learnt anything from Covid it’s the need to get information from relevant authorities and official sources of information.

The below points by authorities correct some common misconceptions:

- *“... evidence suggests that even completely removing floodplain harvesting from the northern Basin and constraining all other activities to remain the same, would only increase average annual water availability in the NSW Murray by less than 1%”<sup>1</sup>*
- *“Current analysis indicates that there is no evidence to support a proposition that floodplain harvesting is occurring during cease to flow events or that it could be considered to be contributing to either starting the cease to flow period sooner or extending the cease to flow event in a meaningful way.”<sup>2</sup>*
- *“There is evidence that the Barwon-Darling River ran dry for significant periods before there was any floodplain development. There is also evidence to indicate that the practice of floodplain harvesting is not making this worse. While development can affect river flows, climate causes the river to run dry for extended periods.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/75986/0084%20NSW%20Government.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/75986/0084%20NSW%20Government.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/404668/river-flows-and-climate-over-time.pdf](https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/404668/river-flows-and-climate-over-time.pdf)