
MEDIA RELEASE

78% back licensing floodplain harvesting – let's get on with it.

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Almost 80 per cent of submissions support licensing floodplain harvesting and 96% support metering the practice, as hearings for the Upper House Inquiry into floodplain harvesting get underway today,

“The bottom line for the Committee is there is broad support for licensing and metering floodplain harvesting,” said NSW Irrigators Council CEO Claire Miller. “It is long past time for our decision-makers to get on with the job.”

“Floodplain harvesting is already a recognised form of water take under the Cap and the Basin Plan. Regulating the practice does not give irrigators new water they were not already using.

“Rather, regulation is the last piece of the Basin Plan puzzle in which historic levels of take are incorporated into the models and the volume then reduced to sustainable limits.

“This is the same process in which the Murray Darling Basin Authority has adjusted the Basin Plan’s 2009 baseline diversion levels in other valleys and States to reflect more accurate knowledge over time.

“Once complete, every major form of water access will meet National Water Initiative standards of being metered and capped at sustainable limits.

“The Basin States and Commonwealth agreed to this process when they signed the Basin Plan. It is not tenable to ask some valleys to be singled out for different treatment.

“Our analysis of submissions shows those who oppose licensing floodplain harvesting generally don’t understand that regulation means cutting back irrigators’ historic access by up to a third.

“Yes, floodplain harvesting has grown, and that’s why Government needs a mechanism in place to reduce the volume of take.

“Without regulation progressing for volumetrically-limited licences and metering requirements, the current situation with uncontrolled and unlimited take will only continue.”

“All we ask is that the Inquiry listens to the relevant authorities and acts on their advice rather than keyboard warriors who want to throw out the Basin Plan and irrigated agriculture with it.

“The relevant authorities have provided expert advice that this reform will provide significant benefits to the environment, and allow these river valleys to limit their water use to legally enforceable sustainable limits.”

“We hope the Inquiry will challenge those who perpetuate myths that are contrary to expert opinion from the relevant authorities.”

Common examples include the myth that floodplain harvesting causes rivers to run dry, or impacts on water allocations downstream. Authorities have corrected the record, stating:

- *“... 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%”¹*
- *“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.”²*
- *“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.”³*

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

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

³ https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/404668/river-flows-and-climate-over-time.pdf