

MEDIA RELEASE

Environment gets 100 billion litres more for Christmas

17/12/2021

Regulations gazetted today will leave 100 billion litres more water in rivers and floodplains while imposing strict rules to limit floodplain harvesting.

Irrigators and communities are bracing for the socio-economic impacts of less water to grow food and fibre, but nonetheless support licensing and metering floodplain harvesting.

“The Government has listened to expert advice, including SA Royal Commissioner Brett Walker, SC, who warned of the urgency of this reform in the hearings,” said NSWIC CEO, Claire Miller.

“The regulations also follow an Upper House Committee inquiry, which failed to find any legitimate reason to delay this public interest reform any longer.

“All stakeholders agree floodplain harvesting must be reduced, licensed and metered so that all water take is within sustainable limits in the Basin Plan and other water sharing frameworks.

“Affected irrigators are not out there celebrating – the reality of losing about a third of their historic take without compensation is biting.

“But after nearly two decades of modelling, analysis, data collection and ground-truthing, and more than \$56 million of federal and state funding, it is long past time just get on with the reform so everyone has certainty.”

The regulations enforce NSW compliance with existing overall diversion limits agreed by all Basin States and written into Commonwealth law. The process NSW has gone through is the same as other Basin States, where baseline line diversion limits have been adjusted to reflect more accurate information not available before the Basin Plan was enacted in 2012. Sustainable diversion limits will be reviewed in 2026 as required in legislation.

The amount of water allocated to water licences varies each year depending on availability. Reduced allocations due to climate change and other variables is not compensable.

Floodplain harvesting in NSW currently takes an estimated annual average 350 – 390 billion litres, or about three per cent of annual average inflows in the northern Basin. A recent IPART report indicated this will reduce to 259 billion litres, or about two per cent, under the regulations.

“Every year floodplain harvesting remains unregulated, is another year that an average 100 billion litres of water comes off floodplains and rivers for irrigation instead, said Ms Miller. “The delays have got to stop.”