



Nature Conservation Council

The voice for nature in NSW

18 April 2022

Select Committee on Food Production and Supply in NSW
NSW Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney 2000

Dear Ms Oravec,

Questions on Notice - Food production and supply in NSW

Please take this letter as our response to the questions taken on notice during NCC's appearance before the Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning on 21/03/2022 for the inquiry into Food production and supply in NSW.

Question: The policy priorities that you would have for the current New South Wales Government around water use, what would you like to see as the key priorities?

Answer: The Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) believes that floodplain harvesting is a fundamentally problematic practice requiring detailed and clear understanding between stakeholders, government and compliance with existing legislative frameworks. It is best done with public and transparent information.

We believe any future regulation of floodplain harvesting must have genuine regard for the needs of rivers, wetlands, and their dependant ecosystems, and that all floodplain harvesting is regulated in accordance with the State's legal obligations arising from the Water Management Act 2000 (NSW), Water Act 2007 (Cth), the Murray Barling Basin Plan, and other relevant Commonwealth legislation.

The NSW Government must also prioritise, complete and submit all 20 Water Resource Plans and meet the requirements of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.



Question: Going back to water, could you talk to the priority of transitioning the type of crops for which over-irrigating really dominates? Obviously New South Wales takes a lot of water for cotton, but then there are other crops that require a lot less water, which we could be raising. Could you talk to the priorities there and advice and thoughts on transitioning?

Answer: Research has found that sheep meat and wine grapes provide the most efficient water value agricultural products. Cotton and raw sugar are found to be the least efficient, due to their high consumption of irrigated water and low export value. This research found that Australia exports higher volumes of lower economic value “virtual water”, and that this is a concern for economic feasibility and sustainability.ⁱ

Australia’s approach to crop selection for different regions should be informed by considering the water footprint of various crops at the planning stage. Crop cultivation planning must be performed according to the availability of rainfall, the production capabilities of different regions for different crops, local demands, export priorities and climatic impacts now and in the future.

Further analysis is required to achieve this, and to respond to the impacts of future droughts. This work should be undertaken by an independent body.

Healthy rivers and sustainable use of water are vital to Aboriginal people of the Basin because rivers are fundamental to culture; totems, stories, medicines and food.

In his book "Dark Emu", Bruce Pascoe references the journals of early European colonisers to describe vast and advanced systems of agricultural production and economies established by First Nations Peoples.

“Any efforts we make to conserve our land would be best spent encouraging farmers towards more soil and bank friendly activities. Australia must continue to produce food, and farmers are the heart and soul of this enterprise, but there have to be better ways to farm the light Australian soils.

The great advantage of Aboriginal crops is that they have been developed through seed selection, direct planting, and weeding for the harsh conditions of Australia. Many of the grains grow on sand, and require a minimum of irrigation.”ⁱⁱⁱ

NCC encourages the Committee to explore and recommend approaches to farming that are led by First Nations knowledge.



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Your key contact point for correspondence is Executive Officer, [REDACTED], available on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,



Jacqui Mumford
Deputy Chief Executive
Nature Conservation Council of NSW

ⁱ Muhammad Atiq Ur Rehman Tariq, Riley Raimond Damnics, Zohreh Rajabi, Muhammad Laiq Ur Rahman Shahid and Nitin Muttill, 2020, Identification of major inefficient water consumption areas considering water consumption, efficiencies and footprints in Australia, *Journal of Applied Sciences*, 10, p. 6156

ⁱⁱ Bruce Pascoe, 2018, *Dark Emu, Aboriginal Australia and the birth of agriculture*. Magabala Books, Australia, pp. 66-67