

**Submission
No 23**

**SUPPORT FOR DROUGHT AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN NEW SOUTH
WALES**

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Mr Justin Clancy MP
Chair
Committee on Investment, Industry and regional Development
Parliament House
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Submission to support drought-affected communities in New South Wales

Dear Mr Clancy

I have seen first-hand the devastating nature of drought in northwest New South Wales. I am imploring the NSW state government to ban irrigation of thirsty crops, to end corrupt water trading, to return water to the rivers and to invest in secure water supplies for communities that will improve their material conditions and ability to survive during drought-time.

I took part in the Yaama Ngunna Baaka Corroboree Festival in October this year. 250 city folks visited Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke, Wilcannia and Menindee and witnessed large corroborees of 300-400 people being held in each town. Throughout the corroborees, respected Aboriginal community members spoke about the importance of the flowing Baaka (Darling River) in the history, present and future of the river clans. If the government continues the mismanagement of public river resources, not only will the river communities struggle to exist, but song lines will be disrupted. Considering history of white settlement and Aboriginal oppression in this country, this is tantamount to continuing the project of cultural genocide.

While the resilience of river communities is admirable, it is extremely difficult to survive with no secure source of water, food or income in the region. Unemployment is high and many people have been forced onto government welfare, which is a broken system and lowers public morale further in these trying times. Bore water is dirty and can't be used for dialysis machines, forcing people to travel hours to the nearest hospital frequently for medical-grade water. While I was in northwest NSW, I heard a common opinion that the NSW government has given up on our regional towns. I have heard people say that if the NSW government is not planning on securing water in the region, the government should come out and say so because otherwise townspeople are betting on false hopes.

I think it is beholden to the government to treat all people in NSW fairly, to promote the dignity of people and to be compassionate to those in need. These are the values that Australians share and that we expect to be upheld by our governments.

I am writing to demand that the NSW Parliament invests in the following solutions when supporting drought-affected communities:

1. Leave water in the rivers. Filter and return water stolen from the Baaka by big irrigators.
2. Strip water licences from big irrigators.
3. Stop irrigation and mining pumping during low-to-medium flows.
4. Give tanks and filtration systems to all stakeholders in river communities and fund tertiary water recycling.
5. Ban water speculation and trading.

6. Ban floodplain harvesting.
7. End transferable water licences. Anchor water to properties.
8. Give river communities deciding power over keeping rivers alive. This must include Aboriginal communities who have been traditional guardians over river health.
9. Prosecute and ban operations of corporations that pollute rivers, catchments or artesian basins; financial institutions that fund their operations; and politicians who enable them.
10. Establish a Royal Commission and Forensic Audit into political interference in Murray Darling Basin Authority and a Federal Independent Commission Against Corruption to act on findings.
11. Make chain-of-command personnel responsible for anti-river decisions. Hold politicians, senior civil servants and corporate managements personally accountable for their decisions with heavy fines proportionate to the damage done and heavy jail terms.
12. Charge full remediation costs for total damage, past and present, from mining by levies on the mining industry. No free water for mining.

These practical solutions are part of a Call to Action that has been promoted by Water for the Rivers, a social justice grassroots group based in Sydney. I hope that the committee considers these ideas when deciding how to best help communities in crisis.

Yours sincerely

Jodie Pall