

**Submission
No 73**

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

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Date Received: 22 November 2019

I am contacting you to support the drought affected communities in New South Wales. My concerns were heightened after a recent trip to Burke, Menindee Lakes, Brewarrina and Wilcannia. I was there on a "water for rivers" bus trip; our motivation was to hear and see how the aboriginal communities and local towns were surviving the drought. How were their daily lives being impacted?

The communities were excited to see people from the city who cared about their loss and their pain. Their leaders said they haven't felt heard since 2001 - their last big corroboree. The average male life expectancy in Wilcannia is somewhere between 33&37 (can't remember what the leader said was the exact number) Talked about how they used to have rugby league women's and men's teams to come together; developing leadership skills, support mental health and provide support, ;help with integration into the wider community, provide hope and joy.

Unfortunately, there are no football teams now; because they don't have water to water the grass and the ground is too compact. There are none of the 40,000 year old water/cultural activities taking place. The absence of river cultural activities and the absence of football as a community activity,; as resulted in a loss of hope. The aboriginal leaders were devastated, because they believe the current lack of water in the rivers is leading a second severe extinction of their people. They may have some Land rights, but no access to water is no land at all. People talk about the farmers, which we should, but no one is talking about the oldest living communities. With so much to offer regarding land management knowledge.

Coming back to Manly – time is taken to enjoy the surf, surfers, kite surfing, beach friendship groups and weather - every day is different and beautiful.

It is difficult to look at Manly now without visualising; a huge industrial farms growing water hungry crops, because they give the highest return; sucking up water for huge irrigation reservoirs, or the thirsty mines draining the beaches. Besides this scenario not being possible; we individual Sydney siders wouldn't put up with losing our way of life. Because we are a powerful economic block and have the ability to fight for a way of life, a life that we know would be intellectually, emotionally and culturally diminished without access to water.

I come from a farming family, and like any business, they want their farm to bring in the greatest returns. Why should the farmers sacrifice return for the rest of Australia?

Unfortunately, the greatest monetary returns, does not always work well long term for the environment and water usage. E.g. thirsty almonds and cotton. Perhaps there is a need to encourage farmers to grow sustainable crops by providing tax breaks/funding.

Family farmers know there is a problem with climate change and are open to new ideas. For example, my family in Moree know that they have one extra month a year of over 40-degree temperatures because of climate change. That has had a major impact on lifestyle, let alone farming choices and practices.

Lastly, There will be voices for the powerful industrial farms and mining lobbies who will wish to keep the status quo, by which the water is fully owned by Industry and ordinary Australian individuals do not have any rights regarding water distribution. It is just a matter of time until the industry will not be able to ignore the environmental freight train that is roaring into the station., eventually they will be impacted as well. I just hope it is not too late for my children and my children's children.

We need creative, courageous leaders who will work for our Australian future by taking long-term decisions.

My name is Jocelyn Christensen

Thanks for reading - I appreciate your time.