

**IMPACTS OF THE WATER AMENDMENT (RESTORING OUR RIVERS) ACT
2023 ON NSW REGIONAL COMMUNITIES**

Organisation: Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network

Date Received: 14 April 2025



To: NSW Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development

On: Impacts of the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023 on NSW regional communities

The Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network (UMCN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the above inquiry.

The UMCN is a strong and diverse community-based network of individuals, community groups, businesses and organisations (government and non-government) committed to improving natural resource management (NRM) in the upper Murrumbidgee catchment. The UMCN (and its predecessor organisation) has been operating for three decades, in recognition that NRM issues do not stop at State or Council boundaries. The UMCN values knowledge sharing, networking, collaboration and inclusion, and is the regional leader in facilitating communication between the community, NGOs and government agencies.

We note that in passing the Restoring our Rivers legislation in 2023, the Australian Parliament included work to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee and review the environmental outcomes that can be delivered from the Snowy Hydro Scheme. The government has:

- committed up to \$55.6 million to a range of measures to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee.

We note that the [*Strategy to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee*](#) to action this funding was released in December 2024. Acknowledging that 3 projects were fast-tracked, we draw to your attention that implementing the strategy is in the early planning phase. No impacts can be assessed at this point in time.

- commenced the review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed (SWIOID). This is an important initiative for which the community has been advocating for many years as the deed has not been reviewed and amended since its adoption in 2002.

For the Upper Murrumbidgee River, securing water for the region has, until recently, seemed like a policy 'no-go' zone, due to the complex and complicated water management arrangements in this part of Australia created through the interactions and operations of the Snowy Hydro Scheme. Despite 90-99% of the headwater flows of the Upper Murrumbidgee River being diverted out of the catchment for power generation, management of the river – until very recently and only after community pressure – has not considered reshaping the rules



determined in 2002, despite two droughts (Millenium and 2017-19), fires (particularly 2019-20), and an expanding population.

The ecology of the river has suffered as a result, including two localised fish extinctions (silver perch and two-spined blackfish). First Nations connections have been impacted. Cooma – despite being so close to a 250 GL storage – is highly susceptible to drought risks for its water supply. The Upper Murrumbidgee River is the third water supply for our nation's capital region, and its health is critical to support this water supply source. The river is often closed due to poor water quality following heavy rain, presenting a risk to human health.

We note that the review of the SWIOID will be undertaken from 2024-25 to 2026-27. Therefore, the community will be waiting a considerable number of years to consider the future impacts of any changes.

An associated initiative was the updating of the Statement of Expectations for Snowy Hydro Limited. The Snowy Hydro Board receives direction for the operations of the scheme through the [Snowy Hydro Limited Statement of Expectations](#) from shareholders. The statement had only set the direction as an energy provider and company. Following community advocacy, the statement was updated in December 2024 (noting without public consultation) to acknowledge the downstream effects on the Upper Murrumbidgee River and other important values that go beyond the company's direct operations. While this is an improvement over the previous version, UMCN considers there is still work to be done to ensure that Snowy Hydro's operations are fully aligned with the needs of the river, its ecosystems, and local communities, consistent with the National Water Initiative, Commonwealth Water Act, and the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

UMCN also recognises that the river is connected to the lower Murrumbidgee river, and the broader southern-connected Murray Darling Basin. We acknowledge that many communities in the Basin have been impacted by years of water reforms. In our efforts to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee river, we would welcome opportunities to speak with NSW agencies and southern Murray-Darling Basin stakeholder groups to identify ways to improve the health of the river and limit impacts to other water users, using the mechanisms available within state and Federal water legislation and policy (e.g. mechanisms for Sustainable Development Adjustments and/or water recovery programs under the Basin Plan).

In summary, UMCN believes the community is encouraged that after a long period of being considered the 'forgotten river' governments are committed to improving the situation for this region.

UMCN was very pleased to host our second *Working Together for the River* forum in November 2024 with a program focussed on several regulatory and policy changes by the Commonwealth and NSW governments. The forum was attended by a wide range of stakeholders and elicited a lot of interest.



Videos of all presentations are available on the [UMCN YouTube](#) channel with a [short snapshot video](#) of presenter and audience responses to the forum.

Notwithstanding, as outlined above, it is too early to assess any other impacts on communities by the restoring our rivers legislation. We look forward to assisting the Committee in a future review.



Andy Lowes

Chair,

Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network

14/04/2025