

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

**Organisation:** Murray Darling Association (Region 9)

**Date Received:** 14 April 2025

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Parliament of New South Wales  
Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development  
Parliament House  
6 Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

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Dear Chair

**Response to inquiry - Impacts of the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023 on NSW regional communities**

This submission is provided by the Murray-Darling Association (**MDA**) in response to the inquiry by the Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development (**Committee**) into the impacts of the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023* (Cth) (**Act**) on NSW regional communities (**Inquiry**).

The MDA is an association of over 170 local councils across the Murray-Darling Basin, founded in 1944 to advocate for economic development of Basin communities and sustainable management of water resources.

This response is provided on behalf of Region 9 of the MDA, covering the Local Government Areas (LGA) of Griffith, Leeton, Carrathool, Murrumbidgee, Wagga, Narrandera and Hay.

In December 2023, the Federal Parliament passed the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023* (Cth), amending the *Water Act 2007* (Cth) to:

- a) Enable the Commonwealth recover up to 450 gigalitres of water via water buybacks, for environmental use; and
- b) Remove the previous requirement for any recovery of water to have a neutral or positive socio-economic impact.

In our 2024 Member Survey, 64 percent of MDA member Councils either strongly disagreed or disagreed with water buybacks or considered that they should only occur with socio-economic testing and 22 percent were neutral. MDA Region 9 considers that water buybacks are one of the federal government's most damaging interventions into regional development over the past term. Recent research by ABARES<sup>1</sup> shows many Basin communities have limited capacity to adapt to buybacks, which have the effect of removing water from consumptive use, thereby permanently eroding the productive capacity of regional communities.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (which is due to review the Murray-Darling Basin Plan by 2026) has also recognized that it is time to move beyond a '*just add water*' mentality, and

that '*Basin-scale environmental outcomes cannot be sustained without taking an integrated perspective*', which requires '*effectively managing water quality not just quantity*'.<sup>ii</sup> Water quality is of particular concern to MDA members, including addressing the incredibly damaging impacts of European carp. One part of the solution – the carp virus – has still not been released, despite the National Carp Control Plan being published in September 2022.<sup>iii</sup>

We respectfully ask the Inquiry to consider the two following policy priorities of the MDA for the Murray-Darling Basin:

- a) Repealing the mechanism for water buybacks at Part 2AA of the *Water Act 2007* (Cth); and
- b) Expediting the implementation of the release of the carp virus.

To properly implement the Murray-Darling Basin Plan at the local level, it is also essential that councils are involved in decision-making. As the peak representative body for councils within the Basin, the MDA also submits that it be afforded a seat at the table when decisions affecting the Murray-Darling Basin Plan are being made. The MDA seeks to be integrated into decision-making processes affecting the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, so that it can ensure that its member councils are properly engaged in its implementation.

Kind regards,

Cr Shari Blumer  
Chair, **Region 9**  
**Murray-Darling Association**

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<sup>i</sup> June 2024, *Baseline relative community vulnerability and adaptive capacity – Murray-Darling Basin – a focus on irrigation in agriculture*, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences: [https://daff.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en\\_AU/search/asset/1035821/0](https://daff.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/search/asset/1035821/0) (accessed 13 April 2025).

<sup>ii</sup> 3 October 2024, *Early Insights Paper*, Murray-Darling Basin Authority; <https://www.mdba.gov.au/publications-and-data/publications/early-insights-paper-publication-basin-plan-review> (accessed 13 April 2025).

<sup>iii</sup> September 2022, *National Carp Control Plan*, submitted to Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-carp-control-plan.pdf> (accessed 13 April 2025); see also <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/pests-diseases-weeds/pest-animals-and-weeds/carp-biological-control-plan> (accessed 13 April 2025).