

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

**Organisation:** Watertrust Australia

**Date Received:** 16 April 2025

16 April 2025  
Mr Roy Butler  
The Chair  
Investment, Industry and Regional Development Committee  
Parliament House  
6 Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000.

Via email to: [investmentindustry@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:investmentindustry@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr Butler

On behalf of Watertrust Australia Ltd (Watertrust), I am pleased to put forward the following submission to the NSW Parliaments Inquiry *on the Impacts of the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023 on NSW regional communities*.

Watertrust's mission is to improve how water policy decisions are made in Australia. We are an independent not-for-profit organisation, funded by a coalition of philanthropies. Importantly, Watertrust is not an advocate for specific decision outcomes, with a focus instead on inclusive, informed processes that shift deadlocks and enable competing priorities to be understood and balanced to achieve better and fairer water outcomes.

[Watertrust Australia](http://www.watertrustaustralia.org.au) is demonstrating the difference it makes when deliberative processes are applied in real word situations, including consideration of trust, values and fairness. The independence and convening power of Watertrust is helping break deadlocks and deliver innovative solutions to seemingly intractable challenges.

With more than 2.3 million people living in the Murray Darling Basin, holding important and diverse values underpinned by finite water resources, we are acutely aware of the challenges of engaging stakeholders in decision-making and building widespread agreement for contentious policy decisions. To inform NSW's consideration of the impacts of the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023 on NSW regional communities our feedback is focussed on systemic changes to the way decisions are made that will lead to enduring and optimised long-term outcomes.

1. **For enduring and long-term outcomes, policies need to be seen as legitimate by all different groups.**

Legitimacy (and trust) comes through deliberative processes that allow active involvement and negotiation. There has been an erosion of trust in government

including through loss of political bi-partisanship and an erosion of corporate knowledge across agencies. For enduring policy outcomes, processes need to be adopted that rebuild trust.

2. **In respect to The Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023, interested parties and rights holders are not in agreement** about the best path to achieve acceptable and timely water outcomes.

- Rights and interest holders through submissions and ongoing advocacy demonstrate a range of polarised views regarding the issues raised in the NSW Inquiry.
- Decision making timelines for delivery of the 450GL have not enabled governments, interests and rights holders to work together in a deliberative way to plan water recovery that is targeted to identified priorities for environmental water and considerate of the regional context and impact.
- There is still an opportunity to undertake deliberative processes to support communities, rights holders and government to come to acceptable outcomes.

3. **Evidence is contested or unavailable**

Transparency and agreement on information and evidence utilised to inform decisions is missing. Further there are not processes in place to enable evidence or views to be challenged in a more constructive way and to bring these different views together. Without a shared understanding of the evidence (including local knowledge and available science), it is difficult to reach workable solutions to impacts.

4. **With specific reference to the Terms of Reference (f) options to improve future community-based reduction adjustment programs including next rounds of the Sustainable Communities Program**

Community adjustment frameworks co-planned with communities will deliver the greatest long-term value.

- Future community-based reduction adjustment programs will benefit from bringing community and stakeholders in at the start of the design process to develop principles, scope and delivery options. The insights, weighing up of options, and deliberations will inform a program design with the best potential for positive regional impact and acceptance.
- Adjustment program design will benefit from reference to contextual information and evidence regarding basin and regional scale implementation and potential impact.
- Regional prioritisation will benefit from deliberation informed by evidence, with local people as active participants in the development of adjustment measures.
- Support (investment in resources, evidence and time) is required for communities, stakeholders, rights holders and local regional and state agencies to meaningfully engage in the adjustment program design and implementation.

## **Conclusion**

There is an opportunity to do water decision making differently and better. In responding to the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023, New South Wales has the opportunity to lead the way, through delivering processes that transparently weigh up competing and complementary values for better water decisions.

Yours sincerely

**Karen Hutchinson**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

