

Letter to the editor: levy helps with floodplain fight



Dear Editor,

Member support is integral for SRI to be successful protecting NSW Murray general security.

Back in February we asked our landholders to participate in a voluntary levy and thanks to you all, we generated around \$230,000 (ex GST).

This money was critical in our ongoing floodplain harvesting (FPH) fight.

The voluntary levy has allowed us to engage the services of Bret Walker SC, who is considered one of Australia's most formative minds on water.

His report in the up and coming NSW Upper House inquiry confirms SRI's position — FPH has never been legal: it does not sit within the legal limits in the Water Act 2007 and the Basin Plan 2012 and if

NSW increase volumes of take through water sharing plans, it is a direct contravention of federal legislation.

For the better part of 18 months, consultants Slattery and Johnston have been working on legality of floodplain harvesting around cap.

They have showed the distortion and manipulation by departments as they attempt to license above cap and along the way uncovered an increase in storage in the north from 574GL in 1994 to 1395GL in 2020.

The MDBA (remember the government body supposedly working to improve and support the environment) are on course to accredit increases to allow enormous volumes of water to be licensed for floodplain harvesting, making these licences compensable if they are ever cancelled.

SRI members will be paying for FPH licensing twice; once via a reduction in allocation and second via taxes.

This is one of the reasons why NSW Murray general security sits on 30 per cent today.

SRI has been fighting for a return of water since the FPH review began in 2018.

The culmination of our work and determination has resulted in the upper house FPH inquiry, which we are comfortable will end the debate and see water flowing to the south again.

Advocacy doesn't come cheap, especially when your opposition is government departments with deep pockets and no skin in the game and as you are all well aware, SRI landholders don't have time to wait.

This year NSW Murray general security sit on 30 per cent with full dams while in previous years, with the same allocatable volume, we would be clapping our hands on 100 per cent.

Without access to water we are licensed and metered to receive, our businesses, our community and our environment are directly threatened.

The class action is gathering momentum and will prove additional success for our region as we see some changing of the rules already — but not all and not quick enough.

There are many other issues affecting reliability of NSW Murray general security; increasing conveyance, Barmah-Millewa Borrow, Lower Lakes, carryover and Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder.

We have a long fight and at times it will be an expensive one, but your support is integral for our success and with continued co-operation and focus we will see water return to NSW Murray general security.

Yours etc.
Sophie Baldwin
Executive officer
Southern Riverina Irrigators