

**Submission  
No 134**

**INQUIRY INTO RATIONALE FOR, AND IMPACTS OF,  
NEW DAMS AND OTHER WATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN  
NSW**

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# Healthy Rivers Ambassadors

*Promoting a healthy, working  
Murray Darling Basin for the future*

22 September 2020

TO: NSW DAMS ENQUIRY

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to this review. Please find my submission below. I would be happy to provide additional information if required.

## Background to comments in submission

I am providing comments as a Healthy Rivers Ambassador, a member of a group of individuals from throughout the Murray-Darling Basin who aim to generate support for sustainable management to maintain a healthy Murray Darling Basin for the future.

As a professional environmental scientist, I have worked on sustainable management of natural resources in the Murray-Darling Basin throughout my career, which has covered water policy and governance in the SA environment agencies, practical wetland rehabilitation projects in a conservation NGO, academic research on environmental water needs for floodplain vegetation and wetlands, and environmental consulting on natural resources management. I am aware of the extended history of the development of the Basin Plan, and the extensive and complex process undertaken to this point in implementation of the Plan. I have presented workshops on Australian Water Policy and Governance for the past 15 years and have tracked the evolution of the NWI and the National Water Commission as a key element of water reform. A particular concern has been the lack of effective implementation of critical elements in water reforms under the NWI and in fundamental elements of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Dr Anne E Jensen  
Healthy Rivers Ambassador for MDB

## General Comments

The development of the National Water Initiative in 1994 and the subsequent signing by all jurisdictions in 2004 were key milestones in water reform in Australia. The supporting documents and the subsequent creation of the National Water Commission and the signing of the Water Act 2007 set Australia on the path to sustainable management of its finite and highly variable water resources. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan provides a sound framework for sharing finite water resources among all users across the Basin.

However, the effective implementation of the Plan has been hindered by delaying tactics and the application of state water policies which undermine the effective delivery of water-sharing arrangements.

The current proposals for new dams or modifications to existing dams to increase capacity have the potential to remove 770 GL from the pool of available water for downstream users.

New dams do not create new water, they just shift it from one community to another, with serious consequences for communities and ecosystems downstream of the dams.

These proposals need thorough scrutiny to ensure that the impacts of holding water in upstream storages are acceptable or can be mitigated effectively. The Lower Darling River has already run dry twice and flows are failing again. Additional dams in the headwaters of the Barwon-Darling system are likely to make this situation worse. The Macquarie re-regulating weir is likely to have very serious impacts on a Ramsar wetland of international significance which is already recording very serious decline and has not yet recovered from the impacts of the Millennium Drought.

With such high potential for serious negative economic, social and environmental impacts on downstream communities, these projects should be rigorously scrutinised before any construction works commence. Every other option to secure town water supplies and reduce water demand must be considered, including recycling, re-use, reduction of urban demand through water conservation and low-water gardens, aquifer re-injection, rainwater tanks, alternative crops, subterranean drippers and water-sensor controls for irrigation.

Australia has a broad range of know-how for effective, reduced water use in irrigation industries and other water users such as golf courses. This know-how should be applied to this issue before large-scale infrastructure construction with unproven cost-effectiveness or delivery of required water volumes.

I am happy to provide further details on technological options.

Anne Jensen  
Environmental Consultant  
Healthy River Ambassador and River Fellow 2017