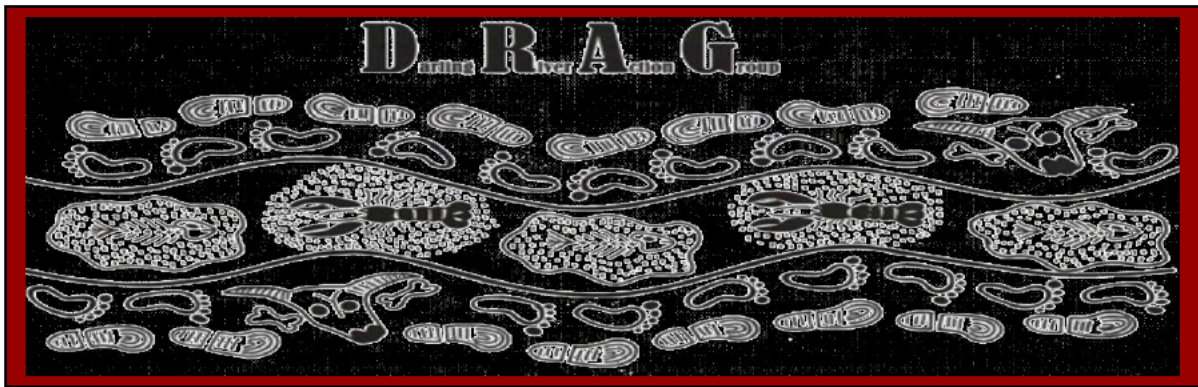


## INQUIRY INTO FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING

**Organisation:** Darling River Action Group Inc

**Date Received:** 6 August 2021

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*Paaka Puuka means (Darling River Dead) leave our Mother alone. You have tortured her for too long. Stop now. My banner means the River is our Mother. When they take water out they kill our mother. The red means the life blood of our southern states and the footprints are the symbol of black and white walking together. The bones of dead animals and fish, means the destruction of all living creatures.*

*Muriel Riley/Elder/Barkindji People*

To: The NSW Legislative Council's Select Committee

### **Submission to the Inquiry into Floodplain Harvesting**

DRAG (Darling River Action Group Inc) was formed over 15 years ago due to the concern of local Far West people regarding the declining state of the Darling River and Menindee Lakes Scheme.

We now have some 900 members.

Our aims are to ensure the survival of the Darling River and Menindee Lakes environment. It is imperative we retain a healthy Darling River and the commission of the Menindee Lakes Scheme including the Greater Anabranch, for the use of Indigenous Peoples, properties, towns, recreation, environment and supply sustainable flows to supplement water from the Murray River to South Australia.

### **Terms of Reference –**

#### **Legality of floodplain harvesting practices-**

For more than 25 years floodplain water harvesting has been recognised by governments as a major threat to the Cap, the environment, downstream communities and downstream entitlements. It has never been regulated, measured or controlled in NSW, nor accounted for under the Cap.

Huge amounts of water are being harvested off the floodplains, depriving rivers of water.

Floodplain harvesting is detrimental to the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

Water stolen or diverted from the floodplains is neither regulated nor paid for but it is a huge loss to the rivers and has major effects on connectivity and fish passage and fish survival (as per fish kills in the Darling 2018/2019). The natural return to the river of the water from the floodplains enables connectivity and therefore, survival of all life in and around the river.

“The capacity of on-farm storages resulting from floodplain harvesting, has increased by 142% (or 2.4 times) between 1994 and 2020, from 574 gigalitres in 1993/94, to 1,395 gigalitres in 2020. The number of on-farm storages has increased from 400 in 1988, to 1,833 in 2020” (ref: Slattery & Johnson report, Feb 2021)

The destruction caused by turning a “political blind eye” to floodplain harvesting is both very obvious and devastating to all down stream.

Illegal Floodplain harvesting that occurs in the northern basin has an adverse effect on the social, environmental, economic and cultural aspects of all entities down stream from point of diversion.

### **Water regulations published 30/4/2021-**

DRAG on behalf of our community disagreed with the Water regulations published 30/4/2021 in its entirety. We totally supported the recent disallowance in parliament.

### **How floodplain harvesting can be licensed, regulated, metered and monitored so that it is sustainable and meets the objectives of the Water Management Act 2000 and the Murray Darling Basin Plan-**

DRAG does not support floodplain harvesting in any form. All man made diversions or structures that stop the natural flow of water returning to the river off the floodplain should be removed.

If current governments find a need to legislate floodplain harvesting, DRAG representatives are willing to engage with elected representatives and government departments to find a workable solution that allows the river and all of its environs to survive today and into the future.

One of the major issues that effect connectivity and river health is that there is no discussion or agreement on end of valley flow from all the Barwon Darling tributaries. A certain amount of flow must be available before water is allowed to be extracted.

### **Conclusion-**

It would seem that over the past 15 years there has been a concerted effort by upstream Businesses, Irrigation Lobbies and Government agencies to decommission the Menindee Lakes and keep as much water upstream of Bourke as possible. This will not be tolerated by people living along the lower Darling. Water flowing in our rivers and lakes is not a commodity purely for commercial gain. Healthy Rivers and Lakes are far more valuable to this Country than any crop and the health of the river and lakes system should be put ahead of all other considerations. Without a healthy Darling River and Menindee Lakes there can be no healthy Murray River system. The Darling and Murray River systems are RIVERS, not irrigation channels and must be left as rivers.

It is the political will that is missing and the courage to make the correct decision and follow it through that is lacking.

DRAG  
(Darling River Action Group Inc)  
5/08/2021

Yvonne Stewart  
Secretary DRAG Inc

Ross Leddra  
President DRAG Inc