

INQUIRY INTO FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING

Organisation: Barwon-Darling Water

Date Received: 14 August 2021



13 August 2021

Select Committee on Floodplain Harvesting *August 2021*
Inquiry into Floodplain Harvesting
Dear Sir or Madam

Submission from: Barwon-Darling Water

Barwon-Darling Water

Barwon-Darling Water Inc (BDW) is the peak body representing water users on the unregulated Barwon-Darling River.

Barwon-Darling Water is an independent, apolitical body funded by its members. It was set up to provide advice on the Barwon-Darling River to members and decision-makers, to assist with policy development, and to advocate on behalf of the interests of its members.

Our membership is made up of local water user groups – including local government, irrigators, and basic right users. We represent all licence holders and water users on the Barwon-Darling – from Mungindi on the Queensland border to the Menindee Lakes.

BDW members have been involved in the water reform process, especially in relation to the unregulated Barwon-Darling River, for many years. This work has included:

1. Co-operating with other stakeholders to create a set of environmental flow rules for the Barwon-Darling (through the first Barwon-Darling River Management Committee)
2. Assisting in development of the Barwon-Darling Cap Management Strategy of 2007;
3. Representation in development of the Barwon-Darling Water Sharing Plan 2012;
4. Working with DPIE Water on development of the Floodplain Harvesting Strategy; and
5. Working as part of the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on development of the Barwon-Darling Water sharing Plan and Barwon-Darling Water Resource Plan 2020.

We have also been involved in discussions regarding Floodplain Harvesting in the norther basin and specifically on the Barwon-Darling River since the mid 1990's..

Barwon-Darling Water is a member of NSW Irrigators Council and the National Irrigators Council and has strong connections with other valley and industry groups including the Northern Irrigators Group and Cotton Australia.

Barwon-Darling Water welcomes the opportunity to have provide an input into this inquiry into Floodplain Harvesting being carries out by the NSW Select Committee on Floodplain Harvesting.

Submission on FPH

Barwon-Darling Water Inc (BDW) is a member of the NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC), and as such, BDW support the detailed submission of NSWIC.

Barwon-Darling Water also wishes to provide the following comments:

It is our view that all forms of water take, including Floodplain Harvesting (FPH), should have to comply with the 1993/94 Cap, and be metered and measured. These are basic principles of good water management.

This requires the NSW Government to subject FPH to licensing and metering requirements, so that government can limit and manage this form of take.

We understand that this regulation will reduce the amount of floodwater irrigators will be able to access, and we understand the social and economic impacts that comes with reduced water access. For that reason, we are pleased that the directly affected irrigators are embracing this reform, because it is the right thing to do for our whole industry, and for water management for the New South Wales and the Basin.

We are aware of technical reports produced by DPIE-Water, looking into the environmental benefits, downstream outcomes as well as independent reviews of the modelling. These reports show the reform will limit how much floodwater can be stored, meaning more water will stay on floodplains or flow back into creeks and rivers. The science shows the reform will have positive outcomes for floodplain environments, including waterbirds, native vegetation, and native fish. It is disappointing this has not happened sooner, so these benefits could be realised.

For these reasons, we recommend to the Select Committee that:

- *Floodplain harvesting be reduced to the 1993/94 Cap through licensing requirements (like all other forms of water take), returning additional volumes to floodplain environments;*
- *Floodplain harvesting must be metered and measured (like all other forms of water take) for accountability, transparency and to ensure compliance.*
- *Rainfall Runoff be exempted from requiring a licence (when FPH is not occurring), so farmers can continue operating their farms as they always have (to meet environmental obligations to prevent potentially contaminated water running off their fields from entering waterways, and to recycle water on-farm).*

Riverine connectivity is of paramount importance, and we see this reform as part of efforts to improve connectivity.

A drought management reform is already occurring concurrently as a broader program of DPIE-Water, to improve river flows when droughts first break, and during dry seasons.

Importantly, the reform does not decide what the limit is. We already have limits under NSW law and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and this reform will just make Floodplain Harvesting compliant with those existing limits.

Licensing and metering is the only way forward, to give Government a mechanism to manage this form of water take.

This is a unique opportunity for the Parliament of New South Wales to regulate an industry that is advocating regulation.

This reform must progress without delay.

Yours sincerely

for Barwon-Darling Water Inc