

## INQUIRY INTO FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 13 August 2021

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Partially  
Confidential

Dear Chair,

I am a Gwydir Valley based irrigator and dryland farmer with 2300ha total of which 800ha is developed for irrigation. Working and managing this business for 40 years, of which 30 years experiencing irrigated crops. In water lean years of 0-20% cropped we employ 2-3 staff and in wetter cycles 50-60% cropped, 5-6 staff. The three main messages of my submission areas follow:

The ability to legally access flood plains supplementary water gives a greater assurance to our business and the community, be that as direct on farm employment or employment in affiliated business houses locally and abroad. This does not only effect irrigators but everyone else in our regions. This includes, dryland farmers, graziers, local business houses, employees, government workers, other more remote communities that rely on Moree as a hub and more, are all effected. However, this has the potential to have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable members of our community. This is due to the economic impacts this has.

For example, the town of Collarenebri west of Moree was once a thriving town. Since Colly farms sold their water licences, the town has dwindled to almost nothing. The people most impacted however, are not owners or managers of Colly farms, but the lower socioeconomic members of the community. These members may have once worked on the Colly farm or had family that worked on the farm. Since the farm no longer has the amount of work it once did, the number of people in the town has dwindled. This not only limits employment opportunities but has other indirect consequences such as decrease in house prices in the local township. This creates an economic barrier to the more vulnerable people within the community. Someone who may have moved to Collarenebri for work, bought a house, now has to pay an overpriced loan on a property that they either have to hold or sell at a loss. They must do this while they have no work in the area and therefore must move, likely rent elsewhere, so they can find work in order to pay an overpriced loan. This is an example of the dire impacts of restricting the scarcest resource of our economy, water.

A contrasting example is less than 150km north of Moree in Goondiwindi. Queensland water laws manage to balance the interests of the community, environment, and producer much better than the current approach of NSW. Goondiwindi have a similar economy to Moree in that its primary industry is agriculture, however, due to greater certainty, has also been able to diversify to have some small manufacturing and processing businesses. These businesses have been able to develop as the primary industry, agriculture, has greater certainty as a result to greater access to water. This has resulted in Goondiwindi having more small businesses and sustaining a growing population. Moree was once much more prosperous than Goondiwindi, however, due to restrictions and the supplementary allocations being reduced multiple times, the community has less economic certainty.

This flood plain harvesting plan and the reallocation of the supplementary licence in full will create greater economic certainty for the entire northwest NSW and especially those people who are most vulnerable within the community. The current decrease in the supplementary licence has already caused uncertainty within the community.

I as an irrigator have put so much into floodplain harvesting licensing to achieve something for everyone, find it a kick in the guts to have a supplementary licence, the more viable and sometimes relied on, halved because the government doesn't believe a clear set of rules or the data. We have followed the rules and aren't thieves. This has created more year-on-year uncertainty as well as bemused our bank managers as to business solvency due to reduced asset wealth, and here we are talking about legal or not. Who are the thieves really! All supplementary stakeholders in our valley,

state and federal, have a say in the proportions allocated in each event, or not allocated sometimes in bad droughts.

That's not a buy back nor reasonable.

It is time for greater certainty for our community. The flood plain harvesting plan is not new, it is historical and at length, for 8 years scrutinised, inspected, recorded, modelled, surveyed, and then drafted. All this to capture the froth off the top of a flood event, but now to please make it transparent, accountable, and legal. We have managed our business with accurate meters and surveyed dam gauge boards all this time, again, it's not new, it's for environmental, community and business sustainability. We have benchmarks, caps, and averages we can work from together, surely 21 years on from the water act of 2000 we can turn the key, would be appropriate. Government needs to "accept" the time and effort put into this and work from there, just like I am "willing" to do. By accepting this plan, I suspect it will show irrigators "take" to be a lot less than anticipated as fundamentals like access in floods to pump sites and gates become inhibited, as well as mechanical malfunctions and the like, even though water is available. Also, I hear we have reached our cap without take this season, if so, available can't be "assumed" as "take". Metering will define all these separately, not a trigger point way downstream which is accounted for from the start of an event.

I also want to express support in exempting rainfall run off within my irrigated area from flood plain harvesting licence, or any other method used. I am bound by law to take it, it drains my field, its mixed with already legally metered water so has affiliation to flood plain harvesting. With compliance it is separated measurably and accounted for, also without fees and charges that licencing attracts.

In finalising could parliament please review and give back our supplementary and accept the FPH plan as is and acknowledge the tyranny of work so far. I am eligible, compliant and willing to accept this future regulation, no more dilly-dally. Thank you for the opportunity to have a say and invite any further discussion or clarity anytime.

Yours sincerely,