

**Submission
No 126**

INQUIRY INTO FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING

Name: Mr Kitt Forbes

Date Received: 13 July 2021

To the committee,

I'm writing to urge you to seriously consider the impacts on the environment of diverting water out of the native ecosystem of the Murray-Darling for industrial purposes. As a person born in the 1990s, I'd naturally assumed growing up, that you older and wiser folks in power would know more than me about how to create a fairer society and move forward with better and less destructive practices. What I know now, makes me reassess this. The importance of fairness and of preserving our environment is taught in schools and seems obvious to me, but perhaps my teachers' efforts would've been better spent educating people such as yourselves.

I'm a concerned citizen of Victoria and proud Tasmanian. My home state is largely regional and this is perhaps why I feel a keen connection to the importance of the country on which we live and how we treat it, and also how we treat each other. Tasmania is a lucky state, in that it is very wet. It also doesn't share that characteristic flatness that dominates much of mainland Australia. I was taught in school about desertification and the link between land-clearing and soil salinity issues and was relieved to see that Tasmania was spared from the brunt of these problems, perhaps because of these lucky quirks of the Tasmanian landscape and climate. As a young person travelling interstate I was always struck by how barren and dry so much of regional Australia looked from the plane windows - a patchwork of brown and grey and barely a tree or creek to be seen right up to the horizon. Mainland states are clearly not so lucky.

There is extensive research on the Murray-Darling basin and its foundational role in vast ecosystems across state boundaries. Flooding in Queensland should have knock-on effects that can be felt as far away as the mouth of the Murray on the coast of South Australia. Frankly, these effects are no longer felt. The closing mouth of the Murray river is symbolic of a cascade of dominoes stemming from the greed of those further upstream. Rain that falls in northern New South Wales should not be treated as a localised opportunity for water windfalls, but as a part of the life cycle of a far broader environment. The diversion of water into industrial farming and the commodifying of water for trading should be a concern to all those in public life. This needs to be regulated thoroughly, strictly and see the whole picture, rather than emphasising the views of those making money out of arrangements that suit them, and damage the lives, livelihoods and environs downstream.

My partner lives in a border community and I visit him regularly. I've gotten to know how river communities work, how everyone from the farmers of Australia's fruit-bowl to the local indigenous people, their culture to the public servants all rely on the river. His father works for a local water authority and is regularly threatened for daring to enforce existing rules. Corporate bodies and a few greedy farmers make doing his job difficult for him, and yet all he is empowered to do is give these rule-breakers a slap on the wrist. Water is a precious, life-giving resource and should be protected far more fiercely, especially in these times of a changing climate. Brave people in this profession in Victoria make decisions that affect the lives of everyone from Corryong to Mildura. Your own decisions affect a far, far broader community, both within and well beyond the boundaries of your state, and I urge you to treat that responsibility with the reverence it deserves.

All of you on this committee have a choice, you can either be small people that rubber stamp the worst impulses of humanity or you can choose to be bigger people, rise to this occasion and protect our country. You owe it to the people of Wentworth, the people of Willcannia, the people of Menindee and to the people of Australia, to scrutinise what is happening and to foster change. Make a real difference to the people that current practices are leaving behind. Long after the cotton millionaires, the international water chancers in our auction houses, their lobbyists

and their friends have disappeared into retirement on their earnings, Hansard will record you as responsible for what they leave for the rest of us. You are the ones accountable for the Australia that you leave to generations like me, who seem to be better informed about the dangers of the modern world than some of you. The faceless lobbyists that you may know very well, will not be the mugs printed in newspapers and history books, it will be yours.

I am proud of the advocacy of my partner's father, of NSW state MP Helen Dalton, of Friendlyjordies' 'Blood Water' documentary. Our country should be proud of them. Please also try to be someone that our country should be proud of.

Thank you,
Kitt Forbes