

INQUIRY INTO FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING

Organisation: Mid to Lower Murray Horticulture

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13 August 2021

Committee Secretary
 Select Committee on Floodplain Harvesting
 NSW Legislative Council
 Via email: floodplainharvesting@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Mid to Lower Murray Horticulture submission to the NSW Floodplain Harvesting

The following submission is made on behalf of the Industry Representative Bodies responsible for Almonds, Citrus, Grapes (Wine, Table and Dried), Pistachios, Summerfruit, and Dried Treefruits.

Our organisations support a healthy riverine environment and the implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan as being important to irrigators and the river communities.

Our group is concerned for the growers irrigating permanent horticultural crops in the Southern Basin operating below the Barmah Choke that face the critical issue of water deliverability, particularly during the peak demand period for crops in summer.

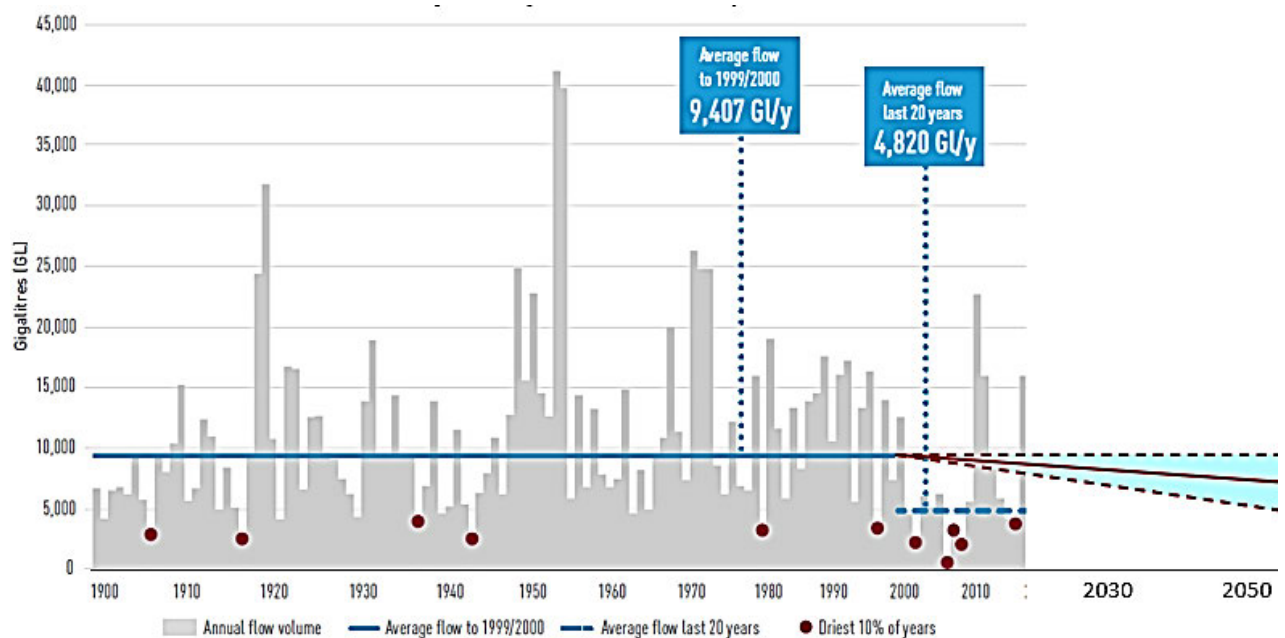
Our interest in floodplain harvesting is the impact such activity has on water flows to the southern water storages on the Darling River system and their capacity to contribute water to meet South Australia's annual allocation under the Murray Darling Agreement.

The over allocation of water use licenses to irrigation developments on the Murray below the Choke by State governments requires flows in Summer beyond those that can be sent through the Choke without causing environmental damage. This means the contributions from the Darling River flows are key to lowering delivery pressure along the Murray to supply South Australia's minimum annual water share of 1,850 gegalitres.

During the current period of grave concern around deliverability for existing Mid and Lower Murray irrigators, State governments should refrain from approving additional "water use licenses" to irrigators in this region. The Victorian government has acted responsibly in heeding the call for a moratorium on the issuing of new water use licenses until deliverability of supply to existing licenses can be assured.

Our group calls for a cessation by the NSW government to the issuing of water use licenses for new developments that without an engineering solution to the Choke's reduced, and further diminishing, stream flows will leave approved irrigation enterprises without the ability to maintain the pumping schedules needed for their permanent crops.

Apart from deliverability concerns, CSIRO studies show there has been an impact on the availability of water due to a large reduction in inflows across the Murray-Darling Basin in the past 20 years caused by lower rainfall.



Floodplain harvesting of water previously destined for the Darling River system is exacerbating this situation. Floodplain harvesting in the Darling Basin needs to be curtailed and illegal activities stopped.



We have noted commentary that floodplain harvesting in the Northern Basin is having a greater impact on low and no flow events than climate change.

The harvesting of water from floodplains reduces the amount of water to maintain downstream river health, wetland needs, and meet the water supply entitlements of other users.

The Water Management Act 2000 requires water to be only undertaken by way of a licence. The Act also requires such licensing to consider the ecological functioning of floodplains. Further water diversions must not be approved by government.

Our group is seeking from the NSW government:

- A moratorium on issuing additional licences for floodplain harvested water from the Darling.
- The proposed 500% carryover to be scaled back and available only once the environmental, cultural, and entitlement obligations to the Southern Basin have been met.
- A moratorium on issuing new water use licences for developments extracting from the Murray downstream of the Barmah Choke until the Darling consistently contributes adequate volumes to help meet South Australia's annual entitlement, or an engineering solution to the Barmah Choke's limited stream flows can be implemented.
- The dismantling of unauthorized structures that facilitate floodplain harvesting.
- The metering of all floodplain harvested water.
- The enforced compliance of the rules and regulations for water extraction and use.

The Group is supportive of the recently appointed Inspector-General of Water Compliance aggressively prosecuting those breaching licensing provisions.

The management of the Northern Basin is critical to the Southern Basin. Existing irrigators in the Mid to Lower Murray recognise the changing inflows into the Murray Darling Basin and are calling for restraint in further irrigation development until current overallocation concerns can be addressed in the interest of the environment, the cultural needs of first nation peoples, and of existing irrigators and their dependent communities. Similar restraint is needed by the irrigators in the Northern Basin.

Wine, almonds, tablegrapes, and citrus are Australia's four major horticultural export industries with a combined contribution to Australia's balance of payments of \$4.2 billion. Summerfruit, dried fruit, and the pistachio industries also export with the combined contribution of all industries to Australia's Gross Domestic Product being around \$32 billion per annum or approximately \$20 in every \$1,000 of GDP.

The wine industry provides employment for 164,000 Australians, and almonds contribute to 9,500 jobs according to a recent study by RMCG consultants. It is reasonable to believe citrus and tablegrapes make similar contributions to Australia's employment as almonds. Summerfruit, dried fruit and pistachios add significantly to Australia's workforce numbers.

The economic, environmental, and cultural use of water is a balancing act and one made harder by the uncertainties of changing climate, and the impact of reduced inflows over the past 20 years. Poor government decisions for whatever motive/s, will have serious and lasting consequences

Our group urges a prudent approach to issuing water licenses and an aggressive approach to addressing illegal water use activities.

Yours sincerely

Almond Board of Australia
Australian Grape and Wine
Australian Tablegrape Growers Association
Citrus Australia
Dried Fruits Australia
Pistachio Growers Association
Summerfruit Australia
Murray Valley Winegrowers
Riverland Horticulture Futures Group

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