

INQUIRY INTO FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I) am a 5th generation farmer and an irrigator. I am passionate about agriculture having completed a Agricultural Science Degree and worked for the Department of Agriculture for several years before returning to the family farm. The most disappointing aspect of Agriculture today has been the decline of our floodplains and river systems in the last 20-30 years. The lower floodplains of many river systems are getting drier and drier. Creeks abundant with lignum, cane grass and indigo bush plants are dying. Many bird species spotted in our region by our ancestors have not been seen for years. Unfortunately, Australia is a dry continent and these systems need water.

While I was at university it was explained that if Australia was split from Darwin to Adelaide the mass of water (ocean) between these cities would feed moisture into frontal systems coming through the Great Australian Bight and enhance rainfall for the Eastern States. Much the same as when Lake Eyre fills and how generally the following year was a good season. Most farmers would agree that quite often storms tend to follow the same path as previous storms. The fact is moisture creates moisture.

Farmers are complaining about water security and allocations declining. We are told to get more water efficient as there is going to be less and less water in the future. It has been explained to landholders that some environments will have to be sacrificed. But what is causing such a sudden fall in rainfall? Droughts are becoming more common than ever before. Could the cause be, taking water away from our wetlands? This sudden change and loss of habitat has only occurred during our generation. Many on-farm storages and the explosion of permanent plantations has placed extra pressure on our eco-systems. Climate change is commonly said to be the blame for the reduced availability of water. To remain sustainable custodians of this land we need to look after our environments and they will look after us.

In the past these lower river system wetlands were the mechanism that provided moisture to our frontal systems. Could this be the reason that rainfall reliability is declining? You could say that this system works hand-in-hand, much the same as a symbiotic relationship. We appear to be cutting off the hand that feeds us!

Unfortunately, the Murray Darling Basin Plan and Governmental infrastructure funding schemes are not looking at the cause or the solution. Maybe this is just a Band-Aid solution! We need to work towards getting some water back into these environments. Otherwise unfortunately the system will only get worse. It will gradually creep further and further up the river and creek systems. It might be a very difficult situation for Future generations to rectify. Greed and the need to make a living makes us blind as to how to fix something when it's not working. Separating land and Water Entitlement's has only increased water demands on our river systems and hence less water for our natural wetlands. Larger storages like the Wyangala Dam wall project and on-farm storages will continue to take more and more water away from the environment.

The intended licencing of Flood Plain Harvesting is another form of extraction on an already over-committed system. Extraction limits needs to be carefully set and monitored for Flood Plain Harvesting Licences. The environment needs to be carefully understood regarding the need for intermittent wetting and extraction limits need to be agreed upon.

Flood Plain Harvesting is not only occurring in the Northern Basin. For example, in the South the Mirrool creek system that flows all the way to the Lower Lachlan Catchment has seen very little natural creek water leave the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA), unless it is a major flood. Historical flows down the creek were regular and these flows were very important for the

fauna and flora that relied on the intermittent flooding. Infrastructure works in the MIA have created the opportunity to harvest all flows down this creek. This take appears to be unlicensed and is unlawfully removing most of the environment's water without any regulation. Irrigation Corporations were set up to deliver Water entitlements fairly to irrigation farmers. Unfortunately for the lower Mirrool Creek environment this water is being sold for profit, even though this practise could be a breach in the Water Management Act.

We are using water in more intensive out of season programs. We are playing God with how we operate the rivers systems/creeks and now even major flooding events could be under threat. Something needs to change. Look after the lower end environments and the system will correct itself.