

**Submission  
No 198**

## **INQUIRY INTO FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING**

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Submission to

Uncontrolled and unlicensed flood plain harvesting in the Murray Darling Basin is a serious threat to and is currently causing manifest damage to the vast Darling River ecosystem, indigenous culture and downstream economic interests. Further, the insidious and sneaky machinations which have encouraged, allowed or turned a blind eye to extensive dubious, illegal, corrupt and patently unfair activities have cast a lengthening shadow over honest governance.

In 2021 the term 'Flood Plain Harvesting' has the stench of foul play, political intrigue, environmental negligence, short term advantage and dishonest dealings. Yes, we have endless rows of emerald green cotton but have polarised winners and losers.

My submission is;

- There is overwhelming evidence of the massive damage being done to the Murray Darling ecosystem by an excessive water take for agriculture. It is exasperating to be told by science that only 30% of waterbirds have survived the last 37 years in the Murray Darling Basin (Professor Richard Kingsford, UNSW BEES) and perhaps 10% of the native fish have survived since Europeans arrived on the continent. Actions leading to this deplorable situation are not what Australian's would agree to if they had been consulted properly.
- NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service categorically state that, "The state's biodiversity is constantly under threat from activities such as agricultural land clearing, urban expansion, mining, logging, climate change, invasive species and diseases. NSW national parks provide areas where threatened Australian native plants and threatened Australian animals can be protected, monitored, stabilised and recovered".

I challenge members of the NSW Parliament to visit Paroo Darling National Park with me and Aboriginal board members of that park to see first-hand old river red gums dying on mass. Billabongs, once jewels of biodiversity are waterless in 2021 and dying. Then travel to Kinchega National Park on the Menindee Lakes to see what can't be seen and hear what can no longer be heard. Vanished turtles, cod, the mass yellow belly hatchery of the lakes, thousands of avocets, stilts, pelicans, cormorants and barn owls. Their numbers shredded, their songs gone.

- Aboriginal heritage, culture and spiritual purpose is being further diminished. Australian aboriginals have experienced numerous manifestations of material and cultural dispossession since the arrival of Europeans in Australia. The Barkindji, for example, have called the middle and lower stretches of the Darling 'Barka' River home for thousands of years. They were largely removed from their land, concentrated in camps, summarily dealt with, had their children taken, culturally discouraged and were given little chance for gainful employment. In 2021 the significant depletion of their spiritual river, the Barka and its billabongs, anabranches, lakes, swamps and overflow country is another stage of cultural and spiritual dispossession. What kind of

civilised, inclusive, social and caring people are we that pursue a 'winner takes all', 'all spoils to the victor' mentality and now destroy their river and lakes system?

- I understand that in 2011 the CSIRO were commissioned by the Murray Darling Basin Authority to establish the annual volume of water which needed to be returned to the basin annually to sustain the existing environment and so fulfil the MDBA's obligations under the Federal Water Act. The figure that the CSIRO arrived at was 3,900 - 7,600 gigitalitres / annum. The MDBA have since settled on a figure around 2,700 gigitalitres / annum. The MDBA's position (styled no doubt by the National Party) is guaranteed to further erode the environment. This behaviour which conflicts with the Federal Water Act and the Australian Constitution (Federal obligations to Ramsar Agreements) points strongly to political interference at several levels to place environmental considerations well behind irrigators. This comes at the expense of trust in our political leaders.
- Corruption is one of the key considerations in any open and honest enquiry into Flood Plain Harvesting. Democracy is a frail but worthy form of government. Few Australians would exchange democracy for other forms of societal governance. Thousands of young Australians have given up their lives to defend our Australian way of life and democracy. Corruption is rust on the democratic system. It's easy to conclude that certain elements in the NSW and Federal government have bullied scientists, misrepresented scientific research, hidden legal advice to government, misled and deliberately confused the electorate and disregarded overwhelming evidence of future environmental catastrophe. Corruption seems to be synonymous with the Australian National Party. We must remain vigilant and push back against it.

## Summary

The Federal Water Act clearly demands that preserving the natural environment in the Murray Darling basin is to take precedence over social and economic considerations. Flood Plain Harvesting needs to be tailored to this principle. It needs to be wound back, curtailed and controlled to meet the environmental needs of the river systems. Australians want to preserve, protect and re-establish damaged ecosystems. Further and importantly, far more consideration needs to be given to indigenous groups who have a cultural and spiritual attachment to our river systems.

Finally we all need to stand up against corruption in this area and all areas of government.

Guy Cameron