

INQUIRY INTO FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 13 August 2021

Partially
Confidential

The select Committee on Flood Plain Harvesting.

Firstly I would like to take the opportunity to thank the committee for the chance to have an input into the Licensing of Flood Plain Harvesting.

My Name is _____, I am a grazier on the Lower Darling/Barka Flood Plain downstream of Menindee, This is the first opportunity I have had to have input into the devastating impacts unlicensed FPH has had on our area.

The initial DPIE consultation on Flood Plain Harvesting did not visit the Lower Darling to get relevant information. The closest meeting to The Lower Darling was in Dubbo, some 800km away, yet there were meetings dotted all over the Northern Basin. The Lower Darling representatives have as much right to an equal input into the unfair legislation as any of the select few irrigators in the northern basin. These same stakeholders who are then set to benefit from the huge windfall of having previously illegal water take granted a licence.

Why were we not consulted?

Why have our concerns around downstream flow targets not been taken into account in the legislation?

Why aren't Lower Darling/Barka Flood Plains considered in the Healthy Floodplains Plan According to the Water Act Hierarchy, Flood Plain Harvesting is a very low priority. In the Lower Darling we have seen FPH take away security from Stock and Domestic Water, High Security Licences, General Security and even Town water which is the highest priority licences. These are all now less secure because of the continued unchallenged growth of this illegal activity.

(According to the Act to take water without a licence or a meter would be illegal, FP Harvesting has been doing both of these for years)

Any water taken illegally has an affect downstream.

The ramifications of legalising what has been an illegal take, are disastrous for Lower Darling Communities, Businesses, Indigenous Cultures and the Environment.

Unlicensed FPH has caused a major reduction in water flows to Wilcannia over the last 30 years. It has contributed to a number of huge fish kills. In recent times FPH has been a major contributor to lower flows. That has left the Lower Darling with high salinity levels, high algal levels and an unreliable water source, with ever expanding No Flow events.

“The NSW Government is in the process of licencing Flood Plain Water Harvesting 25 years after it was considered a matter of priority by the Murray Darling Basin Ministerial council”. (1) In those 25 years since it was considered a matter of priority,

“The capacity of on farm storages increased by 142% between 1994 and 2020 from 574Gl in 93/94 to 1833Gl in 2020” (2).

There are 1000's of Hectares of Lower Darling Flood Plain that were inundated around the Mid 1970's, that have not seen any flood water whatsoever since then. It is noticeably obvious, that the introduction of Flood Plain Harvesting in the late seventies and growing until now has had a direct correlation to the demise of large flooding events further downstream especially the Lower Darling below Menindee lakes. With the Northern Basin now able to store in the vicinity of 1833Gl (roughly the equivalent of The Menindee Lakes near capacity) There is a huge reduction in the chance of ever seeing major flooding below Menindee. To Continue with the current legislation will sentence thousands of acres of precious Lower Darling Flood plains to death. This would seem to go against the whole premise that the legislation is called The” HEALTHY” Floodplain Project because it will not be a healthy outcome for the Lower Darling!

- FPH must only be accessed once downstream river flow targets and Menindee Lakes storage targets are met. These targets need to be realistic, reasonable, and enforceable when established.
- FPH structures must not flood out upstream neighbours nor deny water to downstream neighbours.
- Carryover is not supported, if the river cannot deliver 100% allocation in a particular year it should not be expected to deliver 500% the following year
- The suggestion of unlimited carryover is untenable and a disgrace. It would exacerbate the disadvantage or detriment of the downstream users who presumably would have suffered comparably from the dry upstream. There should not be any carryover at all.
- FPH should be opportunistic bonus water and only allowed after the environmental needs of the river and critical cultural and community needs have been met per the requirements of the Water Management Act 2000 and the Murray Darling Basin Plan.
- FPH licenses should not be tradable or transferable.
- FPH must be able to be turned off in dry periods.
- FPH must adhere to the Cap in NSW.

Thank you for this chance to voice some of my concerns.

Regards

- (1) Floodplain Water Harvesting In Northern NSW Murray Darling Basin Feb 2021 Slattery and Johnson
- (2) Floodplain Water Harvesting In Northern NSW Murray Darling Basin Feb 2021 Slattery and Johnson