

Submission
No 268

INQUIRY INTO FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 13 August 2021

Partially
Confidential

13th August
NSW Legislative Council

Dear Ms Faerhman and the members of the Select Committee into Floodplain Harvesting,

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to submit to this inquiry. It's of great importance to all Australians as the future of the Darling River/Baaka may well depend on the outcomes.

I'm a member of several groups concerned for the future of the Darling-Baaka. Many of these groups will be submitting well informed documentation to this inquiry. In addition, I'd like to add my personal story to the growing weight of evidence and anecdote against floodplain harvesting in Northern NSW.

I grew up in the south-east suburbs of Melbourne. My family holidays were spent at the beach, so other than vague recollections of my hobby-farming grandfather shaking his head over what could be done for "the farmers" during the Millennium drought, I had very little exposure to the deep issues facing the Murray-Darling. That is until I began working as an environmental campaigner for the river campaign at an environmental organisation in 2018. In the 3.5 years that I have taken an interest in water policy, I've come to know many people whose lives have been altered by the mismanagement of the Murray-Darling. In my travels throughout the Basin, I've witnessed, anger, distress, paranoia, confusion, despair; above all strength from people trying to go about their lives as the river that supports them, disappeared. I recently relocated to Broken Hill, drawn to this remarkable country for its history and beauty, and the openness and generosity of its people.

I first saw the Menindee Lakes when they were bone dry. I remember doing a double take overlooking Lake Menindee from the Old Pooncarie Road, driving into the Kinchega National Park. It took a moment to sink in, that the dusty expanse I was looking at, was an outback oasis that should have held water. I was there this year, when they opened the inlet to Lake Menindee, the sense of relief and joy in the community was palpable. I sleep out at Lake Pamamroo regularly to have campfires, watch the sun rise through the trees, see the water birds and enjoy the lakes as people have done for generations. But unless over-extraction in the Northern Basin is addressed seriously and hard decisions are made, all this could be a thing of the past.

One of the things that speaks volumes to me, is the cease to flow events on the Darling-Baaka. The monitoring station at Burtundy is a 45 minute drive upstream from Wentworth. Flow rates were first recorded there in 1946 and to the year 2000 there were two cease to flow events on record. Since 2000, there's 10 calendar years recorded cease to flow events, and the Darling-Baaka recorded no flow out the bottom on more than 900 individual days.

It's undeniable that growth in extractions up north has coincided with the decline of the Darling-Baaka.

The number of private dams and the volume increased dramatically through the 80's, 90's and 00's. These dams are used to capture floodwaters. Upstream dams have first access to water as it makes its way through the system, as dam storage grows the amount of water they capture grows too.

Extractions were capped at the level of development that existed in 1994, so my question is how can any growth in dam storage be legal?

Communities of the Lower Darling/Baaka suffer from the decline in their river. They pay with increased crime rate, suicide, loss of culture and connection to country, and loss of livelihoods. Why isn't the damage done to people's lives enough to warrant this practice illegal?

Floodplain harvesting directly effects the people of Menindee, Sunset Strip, Broken Hill and Wilcannia. Southern Riverina irrigators are effected by the loss of flows from the Darling that the Murray must compensate. This is an issue that effects the whole Basin, and for that reason it effects every Australian.

I ran an environmental organisations Facebook page on Murray-Darling issues for 3 years, I continue to produce environmental programs, mostly on water policy, for the national community radio network. I've run online events, protests, community actions, letter writing campaigns, information sessions, film nights and I can assure you, as a city kid that there are thousands upon thousands of people in major cities that want floodplain harvesting brought back to sustainable levels.

So to the committee, I'd like to thank you for undertaking this important inquiry, I hope that it can bring certainty and sustainability back to the Darling-Baaka. I would be happy to provide more detail to the committee if required.

Sincerely,

Broken Hill Resident