

## **INQUIRY INTO FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING**

**Organisation:** AGB Farming Pty Ltd ATF AGB Farming Trust

**Date Received:** 13 August 2021

---

Friday, 13 August 2021

Chair, NSW Legislative Council Select Committee  
Inquiry into Floodplain Harvesting  
[Floodplainharvesting@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Floodplainharvesting@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

**Re: Submission for Inquiry into Floodplain Harvesting**

Dear Chair,

My husband, our three young children and I own and operate our family farm in the NSW Border Rivers Valley situated on the MacIntyre river, near the small town of Boomi. We are mixed farmers; we produce beef cattle, wheat, oats, chickpeas, cotton and sorghum.

I am our family's third generation of irrigation farmers in northern NSW and over the course of the last 60 years our family has invested heavily into the Australian agricultural industry. Our family has been focussed on building our own family business to ensure the continuation of the business for generations to come, as well as investing a lot of time and money into our local communities in which we live.

I am writing to express my support of proceeding with the Floodplain Harvesting (FPH) regulations. We support all forms of water to be licenced, metered and accounted for within legal limits. We use General Security, Supplementary and the opportunity of storing floodwater when the river is in flood. Licencing FPH water is not 'new' water, it will actually reduce the amount of floodwater captured than has been stored historically.

Our river system is very different to those in coastal areas and those in southern NSW. We receive very sporadic rain and with proportional small headwater storage, our river levels fluctuate greatly.

On our farm the Floodplain harvesting regulations and licencing will mean a reduction in water access of 15-20%, which will increase water for the environment. Even though this is a significant loss to our production and income, we support the floodplain regulation because it will provide us with certainty and security. There has been a lot of pressure on the irrigation industry, particularly the cotton industry on water use. Our generation has really risen to this challenge and can see the benefits in regulating floodplain harvesting and providing the public with transparency and confidence of our water use.

All our farm infrastructure is approved and licenced at time of development. In addition, through the floodplain harvesting licencing process all our FPH eligible works have been scrutinised multiple times and ways and approved by NSW Government as certified FPH works.

Contrary to unwarranted beliefs about northern irrigation farmers being environmental adverse, our farm has 85 hectares (see photo below) of untouched native trees, grasses, water ways and water holes along our river frontage which support an abundance of bird and wildlife. These natural waterways and billabongs are the first to fill when the river overflows. It is only then that water spills out into our cultivation fields and channel. When this occurs, which is about a one in three year event, we capture a portion of this water to grow crops (Valley wide proportion of water usage for irrigation compared with total river flows shown in *Figure 7*).



*Figure 1 Native riparian area on 'Maple Moor'*

Water management is the most critical part of our business. Our farm is myBMP accredited which means we operate under strict guidelines for all areas of our business including water use efficiency. MyBMP is the highest standard of farming practices in the world. Also, for sustainability, it is only in our best interest to manage our water as best and productively as we can. Carrying over water from high inflow periods to use in periods of drought enables us to manage our cashflow year to year and maintain employees. We are always adapting and striving to produce the most we can with as little water as possible. Figure 2 below shows the use of soil moisture probes in our semi-irrigated cotton (taken January 2021). We use soil moisture probes to maximise every drop of water we can. This crop was grown on floodwater we stored from the flood event in February 2020 and was the only field of crop we grew in 2020/21.



*Figure 2 - Soil moisture probes in our semi-irrigated cotton crop January 2021*

Our winter crop in 2020 and this cotton crop (figure 2) were the first income we have received in just under two years due to the severe drought January 2017 to February 2020. The drought period was very tough on our business and currently it is still going to take us several years to recover.

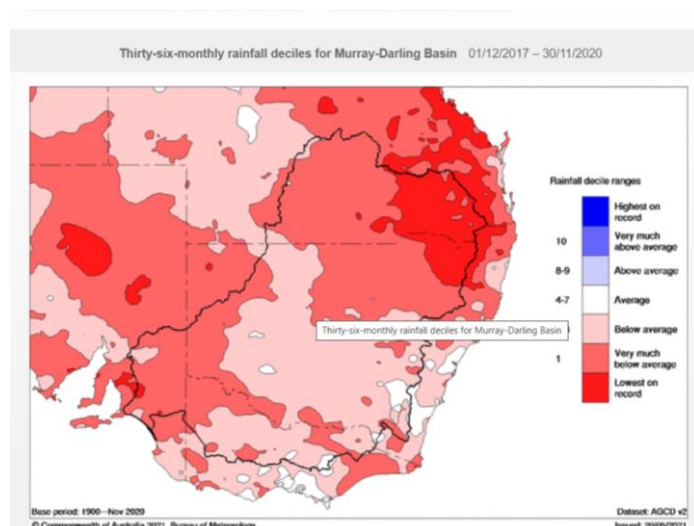


The dialogue that we (northern irrigators) were ‘sucking the rivers dry’ and causing the Barwon-Darling to stop flowing is both inaccurate and upsetting. The MacIntyre river had dried up completely as well as other part of the Barwon- Darling river during this period (see photos below taken at Maplemoor in January 2020).



*Figure 3 MacIntyre River at 'Maplemoor' January 2020*

Figure 4 below shows the catchments of northern valleys received the lowest rainfall on record for this period. There were no inflows into our system, therefore there was no water to flow to downstream.



*Figure 4 BOM 36 month Rainfall deciles for Murray-Darling Basin 1/12/2017 to 30/11/2020*

Finally, once decent rainfall was received in our valley, our rivers ran and water flowed downstream, giving the whole system a well needed rejuvenate. Rain received here in February 2020 enabled Menindee Lakes to receive an approximate 670 GL by June 2020. Following a series of heavy rainfall from March 2021 onwards, Lake Wetherell has now received 1,006 GL.

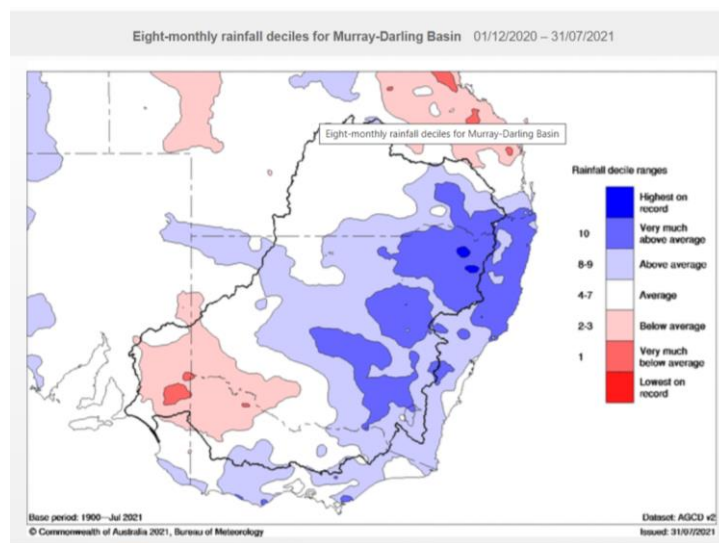


Figure 5 BOM rainfall deciles for Murray- Darling Basin 1/12/2020 to 31/07/2021



Figure 6 MacIntyre River at 'Maple Moor' February 2020 & April 2020

Floodwater is a vital component of our farm whole farm water balance, including building soil moisture for dryland cropping, growing pasture and filling livestock dams. Storing flood water in on-farm storages allows us to grow crops for 1-2 years after flood events. We already measure and record floodwater we store, so we support the regulation. Metering and monitoring of floodplain harvesting allows us to continue to better manage our water.

The rainfall runoff exemption is a critical part of the FPH regulation. Rainfall runoff must be a state-wide policy and treated consistently across all NSW. We need rainfall runoff to be exempt to continue to capture and store all water that runs off our fields that may be contaminated with pesticides, insecticides, fertilisers etc. This is a condition of our works approval and under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act.

The graph (Figure 7) below shows river inflows in the border rivers system and the water usage for irrigation. The graph clearly shows the small percentage of water used for irrigation of the total inflows in flood years. Utilising flood water for irrigation production is the least impactful form of water take as it is storing water when there is an abundance of water. When there are low/no inflows and less water available, irrigation water is not allocated until all other water users are allowed for.



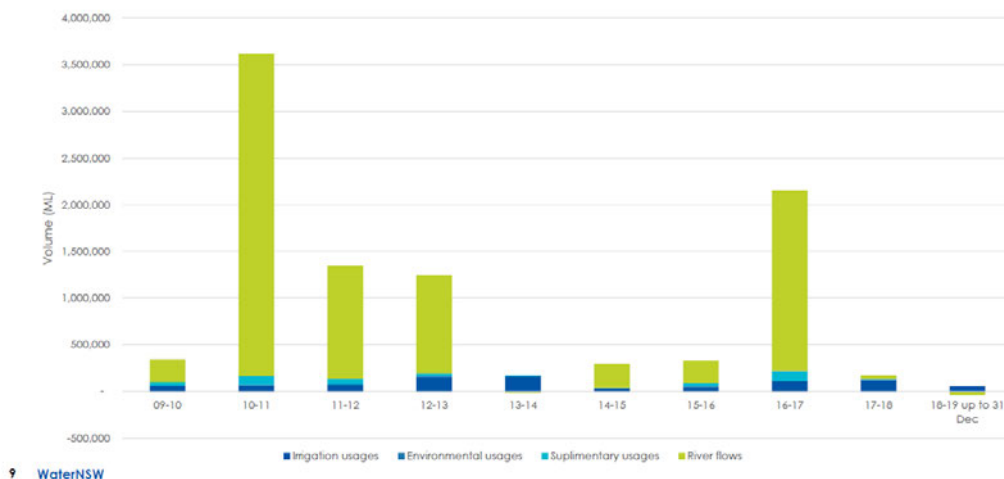


Figure 7 WaterNSW Proportion of irrigation water used to total river flows

All farmers contribute greatly to their communities, through spending locally, donations made to schools, organisations, community events and charities. Irrigation production represents 30%-60% of the gross value of agricultural production in our regions. Boomi, our local community has a surrounding population of 200 (2016 Census) which is very dependent on the irrigation industry. The surrounding farms, the majority family owned, provide employment to many local people and bring people to the region for employment.

If FPH was deemed illegal it would cut our irrigation production by 60%, which would mean we'd have to put people off, which would flow right through our small communities. In the Border Rivers, we'd lose farmgate value of more than \$33M per year, a loss of more than \$75M to the local economy per year; losses of up to 250 jobs, which means 250 less families, fewer children, and decreased services. Our three children attend Boomi Public Primary School where they are currently three of twenty-five in the entire school. During the drought the school reduced in numbers to fourteen children, which would see a similar decline if our area were to lose the use of floodwater.

We are family farmers and part of the community like any other farmer anywhere in NSW. We want what's best for the environment and fair and transparent water sharing across the whole of the Murray-Darling Basin. If decreasing our water take by 20% means better outcomes for everyone, including our own children then we are happy to wear that.

We have spent a huge amount of time and money on assisting and progressing this regulation even though it means less water for us. We want to see it finalised so we can have clear rules to operate under and get on with producing the best food and fibre in the world.

Kind Regards,

AGB Farming Pty Ltd ATF AGB Farming Trust