

Statement: Water management. 6 May 2022.

Climate change

Climate change must be properly included in all water management policy, planning and management.

The effects of climate change on Ramsar sites, including Dharriwaa (Narran Lakes), the Gwydir Wetlands and the Macquarie Marshes, must be investigated.

Review the National Water Initiative

The National Water Initiative (NWI) was agreed by all Australian governments in 2004. It's time it was reviewed and updated. Water is now little more than a tradeable commodity valued only for how many dollars can be made from it. The NWI must be changed so that community and the environment are valued and linked again with the water they need. Governments have to find ways for more water to be provided for the environment and Aboriginal communities before water is made available for use and trading.

Ownership and trade of water

The water market increasingly influences where water is used, often at the expense of downstream communities.

We don't like that water is owned and traded, but while it is, the market needs to work properly. There must be:

- proper regulation of water brokers and trading,
- full openness of water trading,
- a regulatory role for the Australian Securities and Investment Commission,
- a full, easy to use register of water ownership

Water for Aboriginal people

Aboriginal people and their communities own virtually no water. Water should be provided for Aboriginal people and their communities and organisations to own and manage.

The \$40 million proposed but not delivered is an insulting amount. To put this amount into perspective, it has been estimated that the 360 gicalitres of floodplain harvesting licenses being gifted to a small number of irrigators in the NSW Northern Basin are worth between \$1 and \$2 billion. This gift is shocking considering the disadvantage and associated harms being experienced now by the Aboriginal communities of the NSW Northern Basin.

An Aboriginal Water Management system must be established.

Aboriginal Water management must be better incorporated into Environmental Water management.

Protection of the environment

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority has increased extraction limits in all states since the Basin Plan was made.

Total extractions including from floodplain harvesting are exceeding the legal limits.

The full extent of floodplain harvesting infrastructure is unknown and being ignored.

The rivers, wetlands, groundwaters and floodplains and their ecosystems are suffering as a result. We see this in Walgett with our own eyes.

Some politicians and government agencies have told the DEG a new story about what the rivers were once like. They are saying that 'they were often dry like this, it is the drought,' and so on. These stories are untrue and suit the irrigators' business model.

The \$3 billion environmental water portfolio is being undermined in several ways.

- In some places environmental water is not protected from extraction.
- Ramsar wetlands are declining.
- Waterbird breeding and overall numbers are declining.
- There are many fish kills (not only at Menindee) and millions of mussels died in the Barwon-Darling (Baawan-Baaka) in the recent drying of the river.
- We saw Blackwater passing through Walgett in December 2021!

Water laws protecting the health of the rivers and the environment must upheld.

Taking water from the system must not exceed the legal limits.

International agreements such as migratory bird agreements and the RAMSAR conventions must be respected.

DEG will tell the true story about the mighty rivers of the NSW Northern Basin and encourages others including the incoming government to do the same.

Maladministration

There must be a Federal anti-corruption body. Specifically, there needs to be a comprehensive investigation into water management in the Murray-Darling Basin.

There must be:

- a review of the operation of the water market.
- a full independent water audit, looking at water availability and extractions, water recovery, efficiency 'savings', cap factors and Cap and SDL compliance,
- transparency of water ownership and trading,
- a review of the Commonwealth environmental water portfolio,
- a review of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder's transactions with irrigators (such as event-based mechanisms).

These reviews must be conducted at arms-length from the water agencies and the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture (including MDBA).