



**Healthy Rivers Dubbo**

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## **Media Release**

### **Old habits die hard in NSW water management**

The future of the 250 million year old Darling-Baaka River is being decided now as the NSW Government develops rules about how much water can be diverted off floodplains before it reaches the river.

Floodplain harvesting diverts water that either falls as rain or breaks over the river bank into private dams with levee banks. Floodplain harvesting dehydrates floodplains, wetlands and aquifers, and was identified by several reports as a key contributor to the mass fish kills in the Lower Darling last year.

Under proposed new licencing rules, the NSW Government wants to gift those who harvest water from floodplains with an initial allowance to take five times their share of water. Further to that, the river would owe those who harvest water from floodplains a full entitlement's worth of water every single year, whether it floods or not.

It would be close to impossible for the river to provide all of the water that it 'owes' water harvesters.

ICAC's recent scathing findings on water management in NSW identify that there is a "lengthy history of failure in giving proper and full effect to the objects principles and duties of the Water Management Act and its priorities for water sharing." The rules proposed for managing floodplain harvesting in NSW prove that nothing looks like changing.

### **Quotes attributable to Melissa Gray, Convenor of Healthy Rivers Dubbo**

"It is ludicrous for the NSW Government to pretend it is limiting the volume of water that can be diverted from the floodplains. By the time a flood happens, these generous rules would mean the only limit to the volume of water that can be taken is how much can be physically held, which is enormous.

"The impact that floodplain harvesting has had over the decades in dehydrating and weakening the rivers, wetlands and aquifers of the Northern Basin needs to be assessed before the hand out of tradable, mortgageable, compensable new property rights worth an estimated \$1 to \$2 billion.

"ICAC have confirmed what we in the Basin have known for a long time, that the NSW Government department that manages water makes decisions about rivers that favour large irrigators over First Nations People, grazing communities, recreational fishers, small irrigators and water security for places like Dubbo, Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke and Wilcannia – not to mention the environment.

"The Basin Plan asks governments to put the environment first. NSW Government water managers have not been able to do that. Unless we ensure the rivers, wetlands and aquifers get enough water to be resilient through tough droughts, we will all fail."

For comment contact

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*Healthy Rivers Dubbo (HRD) is a grass roots community network dedicated to providing a strong voice for our local rivers, aquifers and wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin for the benefit of wildlife, plants and people. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge that this land was never ceded.*