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Submission
Consultation Paper
Draft NSW water metering framework

Introduction

The Inland Rivers Network (“IRN”) is a coalition of environment groups and individuals that has been advocating for healthy rivers, wetlands and groundwater in the Murray-Darling Basin since 1991.

IRN submitted a response to the NSW issues paper on water take measurement and metering on 13 April 2018. That submission supported the case for universal metering. Both the Matthews Report and the MDB Compliance Review recommended a policy of ‘no meter, no pump.’

We consider that the draft NSW water metering framework does not meet this outcome and is recommending significant loopholes and time delays in the requirement to better measure water take and compliance in NSW.

The framework does not meet the expectations of the general public in NSW that all water take in the Murray Darling Basin will be accurately measured with strong compliance provisions. It will fail to rebuild public confidence in water management and use through greater accountability.

A number of key recommendations in our initial submission have been ignored. These include:

1. The metering of all water extraction is the only way to determine if the Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) as set under the Basin Plan are met in each water source.
2. The definition of high risk area should also include water sources with a high usage of held environmental water and/or provides high levels of connectivity to downstream water sources.

3. That all scope for self-reporting be removed
4. Section 911 of the *Water Management Act 2000* be amended so that no water can be taken when a meter is not operating properly.
5. That the top 10% of any metering threshold in high risk unregulated inland water sources be metered by the commencement of the Basin Plan Water Resource Plans in July 2019

Comments on Framework

1. Key concerns:
 - *Water Management Amendment Act 2018* imposes a mandatory condition that requires holders of all water supply work approvals to have a meter. However, the draft regulation has a number of exemptions that weakens this requirement:
 - The regulation will only be imposed on certain water access licences and water supply work approvals.
 - The regulation specifies which approvals do not need to comply with the mandatory metering condition.
 - High-risk water systems appear to only refer to at risk groundwater sources in the Murray-Darling Basin. Other water sources should also be included in the at risk threshold including unregulated water sources with high connectivity.
 - Emphasis on cost of metering rather than universal compliance outcomes
2. Objectives:

IRN supports the objectives of the new metering framework.

However, we consider that two of the objectives should be applied to all licenced take in Northern Basin water sources as high-risk water systems because the benefits outweigh the costs:

- mandatory requirements and resources are targeted to higher risk users—that is, those that have a greater capacity to take water—and high-risk water systems
- the benefits of water measurement (including risk management benefits) outweigh the costs

3. Types of water take covered

IRN supports the requirement that works taking water from regulated rivers, unregulated rivers and groundwater systems under a licence are metered including supply works authorised by the *Water Management Act 2000 and Water Act 1912*, works taking water for state significant development, state significant infrastructure, or prospecting or fossicking under the *Mining Act 1992* or the *Petroleum (Onshore) Act 1991* and works of irrigation corporations, local water utilities and major water utilities.

IRN does not support a permanent exemption for floodplain harvesting works under cl. 231(f). Overland flow harvested through channels leading to on-farm storage can be metered.

Complementary remote sensing technology should be combined with metering. It is imperative that new floodplain harvesting licences and works approvals allow for metering of water take.

IRN does not support Ministerial exemptions. Works where water take cannot be measured by meters should be upgraded or not approved.

4. Infrastructure size

IRN notes that some supply works or access licences require a meter regardless of the size of the infrastructure. This indicates that infrastructure size should not be a restriction for mandatory metering.

IRN does not support the proposed size thresholds of 100mm for surface water and 200mm for groundwater extraction in inland NSW. The impact of a large number of smaller pumps on reaches of unregulated rivers and on groundwater systems can be considerable.

The complexity of decision-making outlined in the discussion of multiple-works thresholds is a strong argument for all water take to be metered. The assumptions about average flow rates and probability of improved pump efficiencies over time demonstrate key issues regarding multiple-works on a single property. The solution is for all works to be metered.

We note that at risk ground water sources are required to have all extraction metered. IRN considers that this threshold should also be applicable to all unregulated water sources with high held environment water use and/or high levels of connectivity with downstream water sources.

Compliance with the Sustainable Diversion Limit in each Murray-Darling Basin water source can only be measured through universal metering.

5. Metering standards

IRN supports that all new and replacement meters are to be installed to Australian Standard 4747, must include tamper-evident seals, data loggers and telemetry.

The transition from existing meters to pattern approved equipment should have an upgrade deadline so that industry wide standards can be attained as soon as possible.

6. Roll out dates for new standards

IRN does not support the timetable for new metering standards in the Murray-Darling Basin.

All surface water works 500mm or larger should be metered to the new standards by the commencement of the Water Resource Plans in July 2019.

All remaining works in the Northern Basin should be metered by December 2019 and all remaining works in the Southern Basin should be metered by December 2020.

7. Faulty meters

It is an offence under the *Water Management Act 2000* to take water while a meter is not operating or not operating properly.

IRN does not support the regulation cls. 237 - 240 that allow for water to be extracted for an extended period of time at the Minister's discretion with no metering.

The Minister must be notified and all water extraction cease until such time as the meter has been fixed.

Conclusion

IRN considers that while the draft metering framework is heading in the right direction to improve measurement of water take and compliance, it has too many loopholes in the Murray-Darling Basin water sources to allow for greater public confidence in water management in NSW.

For more information about this submission please contact:

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