Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group to NSW Water Reform Submission

Introduction

My submission is a compilation of information obtained from independent fish researchers, recent reports from the MDBA, NSW Fisheries, various media sources, the Australia Institute and Environmental Defenders Office, as well as concerns raised by recreational fishing groups, riparian landholders, floodplain graziers (including the Australian Floodplain Association), concerned residents of various Murray-Darling Basin communities, Aboriginal groups (MLDRIN and NBAN) and Lower Darling River farmers, about impacts to the ecological, economic, social and cultural values of the Murray-Darling Basin.

This submission focuses on native fish because of the obvious impacts that have been occurring to this river biota.

There are grave concerns for the future of the native fish and fisheries of the Murray-Darling Basin in context of operational changes proposed by the SDL project proposals. Further the obvious lack of commitment to compliance and the overall implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in its entirety by the NSW state government, the MDBA, and Australian federal government.

There are over 400,000 recreational fishers residing in the Murray-Darling Basin (and many thousands more who live outside the Basin, but frequently fish the Basin rivers). The Murray-Darling Basin recreational fishing industry is worth $1.35 billion and employs around 11,000 people. Recreational fishing is a vital component of the Murray-Darling Basin tourism industry and for regional economies.

Remember the ‘I fish, I vote’ slogan and that the NSW Water Minister is also the Minister for Fisheries in NSW.

The native fisheries of the Murray-Darling Basin are under enormous and continual pressure. All Basin river systems (i.e. the Darling River (including the Macintyre River and other Border Rivers), the Murray (including the Edward-Wakool system), Murrumbidgee (including the Yanco-Colombo-Billabong) and Lachlan have been identified as Endangered Ecological Communities by the NSW Fisheries Scientific Committee (FSC). Endangered ecological communities face a very high risk of extinction in the near future and is eligible for listing as endangered if it has undergone a very large reduction in ecological function, geographic distribution or genetic diversity, and is affected by a threatening process (source: http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/species-protection/conservation/what-current#key).

The installation and operation of instream structures and other mechanisms that alter natural flow regimes of rivers and streams details the processes that are causing the continual decline of native fish communities in the Murray-Darling Basin. Although climate change, removal of large woody debris, introduction of non-indigenous fish and plants, and degradation of riparian vegetation are also key issues identified by the FSC. In addition to this, over half of the 46 native fish species that are endemic to the Murray-Darling Basin are listed as threatened species. This includes the iconic Murray cod, trout cod, silver perch and eel-tailed catfish.

The community expect the native fisheries of the Murray-Darling Basin to be robust and sustainable. The expected outcomes for native fish are detailed in the Basin-wide environmental watering strategy (BWS). The BWS promotes a significant improvement of native fish populations when the Basin Plan is fully implemented. If the expected outcomes of the $13 billion Basin Plan are not
achieved, then this will be regarded as a major failure of governments to the people who expect a marked improvement in the balance of the Murray-Darling Basin values. In reality there is a complete lack of equity and enforcement of law in the Murray-Darling Basin. The existing water policies strongly favour the economy, and the environmental, and cultural and social values seem to be largely disregarded. Native fish are an integral part of the environment, and are integrally valuable from social, cultural and economic perspectives too.

**SDL adjustment projects – considerations and implications**

The community including recreational fishers in the southern connected basin are extremely concerned about the probable negative implications to native fish populations from several of the so-called SDL adjustment projects. For instance, the Yanco-Colombo-Billabong creek system contains one of the most robust trout cod populations in the Murray-Darling Basin. The proposed Yanco Creek Offtake SDL adjustment project could decimate this highly valued fishery. Similarly, the Mullaroo Creek in Victoria is described by fish ecologists as the “mecca” for Murray cod in the Basin. The Mullaroo Creek is likely to be a major source population for the Lower Murray into South Australia. The proposed SDL adjustment project to construct a weir across the Lindsay River is likely to disrupt flows in the Mullaroo Creek and negatively affect Murray cod breeding, recruitment and dispersal.

It is widely accepted that the Menindee Lakes and Darling River provide high value native fish habitat for fish at the scale of the entire Murray-Darling Basin, especially for the key recreational fishing species (Murray cod and golden perch) and NSW threatened species (Murray cod and silver perch). Whilst this section describes the value of the Menindee Lakes and Darling River in great detail, the concerns previously raised about the other SDL adjustment projects proposed for the southern connected basin should not be understated. All sites are of equal value as far as recreational fishers are concerned.

**Case study: the Menindee SDL adjustment project**

Recent research based on otolith chemistry for natal origin has confirmed that in years when there is strong recruitment to golden perch and silver perch populations across the Murray-Darling Basin, these coincide with flow and flood pulses in the border river tributaries of the Barwon-Darling system such as the Macintyre, Condamine-Balonne, Weir Rivers, etc. After spawning, larval transition to early juveniles occurs in the main river channel of the Barwon-Darling. Rapid growth and strong survivorship occurs in the main river channel during the consequent 3-4-week, long-distance (> 1000 km) downstream movement. The rivers provide sufficient food resources for young fish. From spawning events in the Border Rivers, early juvenile fish, approximately 30-40 mm long, settle along the river corridor but many settle into the Menindee Lakes where these highly productive floodplains provide a perfect nursery for the next 4-12 months.

At approximately 12 months old, juvenile golden perch migrate from floodplain nursery habitats at Menindee Lakes back to river channel habitats when these systems are re-connected. They can then migrate upstream into the Darling River and upstream tributaries and downstream from the lakes to the Lower Darling/Great Darling Anabranch, and disperse into the Murray River, downstream to South Australia and upstream into NSW/Victorian tributaries. Recent data suggests that recruitment and emigration events of Darling River fish contribute to a sizable proportion of Murray and tributary rivers populations. The function of Menindee Lakes as a key nursery area (i.e. temporal patterns of inflow and releases) is now major tenet in contemporary models of recruitment to lower Darling and Murray catchment golden perch populations. Thus, our present conceptual
understanding is that when strong cohorts occur in the Murray River and tributaries these align with Darling River catchment origin.

In short;

- Spawning occurs in the Barwon-Darling system, well upstream of Menindee;
- Larvae and early juveniles are transported downstream along the Barwon-Darling and many settle into Menindee Lakes nursery areas, resulting in strong recruitment of 1+ year old fish;
- Subsequent inflows to Menindee Lakes facilitate upstream dispersal of age 1+ year old fish into the Darling River and potentially the Border Rivers region;
- Flows released to Lower Darling and Great Darling Anabranch provide downstream dispersal pathways for age ~1+ juveniles to the Lower Darling, Great Darling Anabranch, Murray River and ultimately to NSW/Victorian tributaries (e.g. Edward-Wakool, central Murray and Goulburn rivers). Population modelling funded by MDBA and undertaken by the Arthur Rylah Institute in 2017 shows that without the Menindee Lakes nursery habitats, golden perch recruitment potential at the Basin scale is dramatically reduced.

This conceptual understanding highlights the need for improved management and protection of flow events in the Northern Connected Basin that support migration and spawning, and transition to and protection of the nursery function of the Menindee Lakes.

Lake Cawndilla is particularly important because it is the terminal lake in the Menindee system (thus an end point for young fish moving downstream). Research in 2016 found that golden perch juveniles in Lake Cawndilla were substantially larger than the same cohort in Menindee Lake and the Darling River. This productive environment creates the capacity for juvenile perch to later disperse downstream when connecting flows are provided from Cawndilla Lake, thus providing a dispersal pathway to the Murray River via the Darling Anabranch.

To further emphasise the critical role of the Menindee Lakes to golden perch populations is to consider the findings of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office funded long-term intervention monitoring in the Edward-Wakool, which has not detected golden perch spawning and recruitment over the duration of the program. Similarly, local golden perch recruitment is low in the Murray River between Torrumbarry to the Lower Lakes, and is severely limited in the Murrumbidgee River, despite spawning being regularly documented there. Lack of recruitment in these reaches is principally due to the effects of weirs that have reduced the free-flowing nature of the streams, and disconnected historic native floodplain nurseries (such as lakes, creeks and wetlands) from the rivers.

Contemporary research suggests southern basin populations of golden perch – the least restricted recreational fishing target species in the Murray-Darling Basin – are driven by, and hence dependant on, successful breeding events which start with spawning in the headwater tributaries of the Barwon-Darling system and subsequently strong recruitment into and from the Menindee Lakes.

The Barwon-Darling and Lower Darling (including the Menindee Lakes) river systems are undoubtedly under enormous pressure in an environmental sense. There is real concern that the Menindee SDL project will compound this pressure.

The Menindee SDL project proposes to generate water savings by isolating Cawndilla Lake from the Darling River and the Menindee Lakes, and allow faster drawdown from Lake Menindee. It also proposes to reduce the trigger level at which control of the Menindee Lakes releases transfers from
NSW to the MDBA. This will impact significantly on the availability and functionality of important nursery habitat for native fish (particularly golden perch and the threatened silver perch), which will in turn have severe negative consequences on the golden and silver perch populations in the southern connected basin. It will also incur socio-economic consequences to regional communities (especially the recreational fishing and regional tourism industries). This contrasts with the aim of the SDL program – to deliver environmental benefits to the river system.

Significant fluctuations in flow velocities and river heights in the Lower Darling River over the September-October-November Murray cod breeding season will have negative implications for the Lower Darling River cod population. This cod population is recognised as one of the most robust and valuable in the Murray-Darling Basin, and its preservation is critical considering recent blackwater events in the southern connected basin which decimated adjacent Murray cod populations (i.e. in the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers).

Rapid increases in releases from the Menindee Lake Storage will increase the likelihood of extended low flow or cease to flow events in the Lower Darling River downstream of the Menindee Lakes. Water quality issues associated with thermal stratification in the Lower Darling River during low flows are well documented, with resulting impacts including (but not limited to) extensive and localised fish kills. In 2004 thousands of large Murray cod perished in a tragic and publicly documented event.

Responses to the NSW Water Reform papers

The NSW Water Reform Action Plan is a step in the right direction. However, it appears in order for the NSW Government to have embarked on a water reform process it has taken the Four Corners ‘Pumped’ Report, two ABC Lateline reports, the Matthews Report and the NSW Ombudsmen’s report, numerous investigative reports by the media, and the Australia Institute and NSW Environmental Defenders Office, and constant pressuring from the South Australian Government (who initiated a Royal Commission), and also the NSW and Federal Labor Party, and federal and state senators from the Greens, Australian Conservatives and Xenophon parties to have forced them to do so.

The ‘Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party’ has been conspicuously silent on this issue. Their candidate in the NSW Murray Electorate and the National Party MP both live in the Murrumbidgee irrigation heartland and have strong ties to the irrigation industry. The National Party believe that funding native fish re-stocking and habitat programs and amenity blocks for regional fishing groups will appease recreational fishers. This is definitely not the case. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan and water reform in NSW (and Queensland) provide great opportunities to enhance native fish populations at a large scale. The large-scale works required to implement system-scale environmental watering programs will create employment and a boost to regional economies.

The NSW and Federal National parties were given the water portfolios during the largest water reform process ever undertaken in Australia and given responsibility of implementing the $13 billion Murray-Darling Basin Plan. This has been a catastrophic failure. It seems the National Party, the National Irrigators Council and NSW Irrigators Council, and Cotton Australia has taken this opportunity to completely undermine this process.

Responses have been provided to following consultation questions which were raised in each of the Water Reform Action Plan documents:

Implementing the floodplain harvesting policy
Should rainfall runoff be included (option 1) or excluded (option 2) in the floodplain harvesting licencing framework? Option 1 with provisions to mitigate diffuse water pollution.

If rainfall runoff were included in the floodplain harvesting licencing framework, would you support the development of an approach that would allow agriculturally contaminated water to be retained on farm to prevent pollution of waterways? Strict compliance measures should be enforced to minimise the risk of water contamination from agricultural activities. Heavy penalties should apply to discourage contamination from occurring.

Do you support the proposed staged approach to floodplain monitoring? See additional measures below.

Do you support the proposal to provide flexibility through the development of different floodplain harvesting account management rules on a valley by valley basis? See additional measures below.

Better management of environmental water

The measures in this paper are focused on the unregulated systems of the Northern Basin – do you agree that this should be the main focus for the interim solutions package? No – see additional measures below.

Do you agree with this mix of environmental outcomes? No. Are there others we should be considering? Yes – see additional measures below.

Do the measures in this paper adequately balance the needs of the environment with the needs of other water users? No – see additional measures below.

What do you see as the likely barriers to better management of environmental water, and do the measures presented in this consultation paper help to address these? See additional measures below.

Are there any other measures the Government should consider? Yes – see additional measures below.

If the measure(s) presented in this paper are implemented, what would be the likely social and economic impacts? There would be significant social and economic benefits achieved if the measures presented in the ‘Better management of environmental water’ paper were implemented along with the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in its entirety. Successful implementation of the proposed measures in conjunction with prerequisite policy measures and constraint management strategies for the Murrumbidgee River and Murray River (Yarrawonga to Wakool Junction Reach) that are practical and supported by riparian landholders would require large-scale infrastructure works that would create employment and flow on effects for regional communities and businesses. Enhanced native fish populations would provide social, Aboriginal cultural and economic benefits for regional communities and businesses. Improved farm access would benefit regional farming operations and provide flow-on benefits to regional communities and businesses.

Are there any practical or other issues with implementing any of the proposed measures which have not been captured in this paper? Yes – see additional measures below.

Do you agree that trialling measures in these priority areas is a useful approach? No. The public is tired of the lack of progress and lack of transparency from the NSW Government, MDBA and Australian Federal Government on water reform and implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.
Transparency measures

Are there categories of information that should not be made public? No, not from a member of the public’s perspective. What are they and why?

Are there ways that sensitive information can be managed and still made public? For example, by publishing account balances quarterly? All information, including water purchases, water trading, conflicts of interest (especially any conflicts of interest between politicians and private entities or individuals who are benefiting financially from transactions using government funding), etc should all be publicly available. All proposed water purchases, water trading, works and measures (including SDL adjustment projects) should be reviewed annually by independent auditors and the reports made public. See additional measures below.

How would you like to be able to search for details and/or data in a public register of water information? Reports prepared by independent auditors must be publicly available and issues or concerns presented to the NSW Ombudsman.

What issues should be considered in developing a single source of authority on when take of water is permitted and how could those issues be managed? One of the biggest issues from my perspective has been the extraction and diversion of river water when water extraction embargos are in place. Irrigators must know the conditions of their water access licenses and follow the rules. Any ambiguity in license terms and conditions must be removed. For example, how would this operate in areas with limited internet coverage? Additional water compliance officers must be employed to increase compliance activities in remote areas. See additional measures below.

Water take measurement and metering

What, if any, additional objectives should be considered? Identify new technologies available to accurately measure water use.

Should every water user be metered, or should thresholds apply? Some of the large-scale multi-site environmental watering programs would be challenging to meter.

Should the metering threshold be linked to a licence holder’s shares in a water source? Yes.

What is a reasonable threshold to set? This would depend on which location provides the greatest risk to native fish populations. Inland unregulated and inland regulated would be the priority areas from my perspective.

Should there be a different threshold for groundwater, regulated rivers and unregulated rivers? No.

Should metering be linked to the size of the infrastructure that takes water? Yes. If so, what size thresholds should apply? Pump/pipe sizes must be reduced to reduce negative impacts to native fish and alterations to stream flow, especially during spawning/breeding periods and low-flow periods. See additional measures below.

Should there be different thresholds for inland and coastal regions? for regulated, unregulated and groundwater sources? No.

How do you capture multiple works which effectively belong to one user? The relevant standard would apply to each work.
If a risk approach is adopted, should other types of risks be considered in the analysis? Yes, the risks to the environment/native fish populations. Long-term large-scale monitoring is required to determine if positive or negative outcomes are being achieved.

Should exemptions be applied to this approach? No. If so, how would we capture these users?

Should metering be linked to a combination of infrastructure, water entitlement and risk of water sources? Yes.

What is a reasonable combination of thresholds? This should include environmental risks, such as impacts to native fish spawning, survival, recruitment and dispersal.

Are the proposed metering requirements practical and effective? The proposed metering requirements appear to cover issues raised in the media that relate to tampering and non-compliance.

Should existing non-pattern approved meters be replaced with pattern approved meters? Yes.

Are there any barriers to entry into the pattern approved meter market? Unsure.

Is telemetry practical in all situations? If not, please provide details of any constraints. Telemetry may not be practical in remote areas of public land where theft or vandalism is more likely to occur.

Are there any other complementary measures that if implemented would encourage compliance with the metering requirements? See additional measures below.

What is a reasonable time frame for self-reporting? I do not support self-reporting. Over-extraction by BLRs is an issue on small streams and especially during low-flow scenarios. Concerns raised on floodplain harvesting have been documented in the ‘additional measures’ section below.

Are there any additional criteria that should be applied to self-reporting? No.

Are there any other circumstances when self-reporting should be permitted? No.

Are the proposed requirements around faulty meters practical? Yes, would remote sensing technology be able to determine the volume of water used as a compliance measure whenever faulty meters are reported or consistently reported?

Will staging implementation be sufficient to address the supply of meters and certified installers? Yes.

Are there any other market barriers that should be considered? Unsure.

Will manufacturers of pattern approved meters have the capacity to produce enough meters to meet the demand? This depends on the timeframe required to have all pattern approved meters installed across NSW.

Will the market signals be strong enough to encourage other manufacturers to seek pattern approval? Apparently yes.

Are these timeframes achievable? Unsure.

Should the staging be based on the size of user and risk of region? Yes, and risk to native fisheries.

Is this an appropriate way to categorise “large users”? Unsure.
Do you agree that inland unregulated water sources should be prioritised? Yes.

Should any groundwater and coastal water sources be considered as ‘high-risk’? Yes.

Are there any other priorities that should be considered? Impacts to native fish populations.

Should meters be owned by government, licence holders, or both? Licence holders.

Is the market likely to respond with creative solutions to the increased demand for meters? Unsure.
Additional measures

I want the following additional measures implemented (note: these measures are not listed in order of priority):

1. The community and other key stakeholder groups have significant concerns relating to floodplain harvesting and would like the following questions answered and responses placed on the MDBA and DOI Water websites and provided to the NSW Ombudsman:
   a. How is floodplain harvesting calculated? How accurate are the calculations?
   b. How did the MDBA calculate floodplain harvesting take in the Baseline Diversion Limit (BDL)? Are those figures changing with the revised/updated BDL?
   c. Where will the most significant changes occur (i.e., which valleys)?
   d. What are the likely implications for downstream water users, the environment, communities, etc? Will this negatively affect the volume of water that is meant to be available for native fish outcomes?
   e. Is all floodplain harvesting infrastructure compliant with NSW floodplain management plans? Have the NSW floodplain management plans been fully implemented? Why not?

2. The Menindee and Yanco Creek Offtake SDL adjustment projects are not to proceed until they are fully scrutinised and endorsed by independent fish ecologists nominated by local recreational fishing groups. The Menindee SDL adjustment will be achieved by reducing the volume of water lost to evaporation the Menindee Lake Storage. The water storages constructed on the upstream cotton farms apparently work on a minimum 40 per cent loss to evaporation. Apparently the environmental and approval protocols were not obtained for some of these major works. The NSW Government and MDBA should investigate opportunities to achieve substantial water efficiency measures in the cotton growing areas before reducing the volume of water that is meant to be recovered for the environment, before another important fish nursery (Lake Cawndilla) is disconnected, and instead of continually decreasing the frequency of flows into the Menindee Lake to the Lower Darling River to the Murray River.

3. Complementary works identified by NSW Fisheries and the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage to improve fish passage, habitat and connectivity in the Murray-Darling Basin must be prioritised over the SDL adjustment projects.

4. Additional works to improve fish passage identified by local recreational fishers and endorsed by independent fish ecologists must be included in the NSW Fisheries works program described above (see Item 2).

5. Alternative SDL adjustment projects supported by the independent fish ecologists and recreational fishers can replace the Menindee and Yanco Creek Offtake projects if required.

6. SDL adjustment projects must consider potential system-scale effects. For example, the Yanco Creek Offtake SDL adjustment project does not consider fish passage issues further downstream in the Yanco Creek, Colombo Creek, Billabong Creek or Forest Creek. This system is an important tributary of the Edward River, so negative effects upstream will certainly have implications downstream.
7. The recovery of the 450 GL ‘up-water’ must not be constrained to on-farm water efficiency measures. Additional SDL adjustment projects must also be included.

8. Constraints management strategies and prerequisite policy measures in the Murray River and Murrumbidgee River must be fast-tracked and must prioritise impacts to riparian landholders over SDL adjustments. The Constraint Management Strategy for the Lower Darling River must be scrapped.

9. The toolkit measures specifically identified for native fish outcomes in the Northern Basin Review must be implemented with no reduction to water recovery for the environment. Works include improved fish passage, screens on river pumps, protection of low-flows to the Menindee Lakes, etc.

10. The NSW government must purchase all A Class water licenses in the Barwon-Darling Unregulated River Source.

11. The size of river pumps must be reduced to a size that does not allow the natural flow in a river or any natural watercourse to be reversed. Screening of river pumps must be mandatory.

12. Mitigation and compliance activities for agricultural contamination of waterways and groundwater aquifers must be reviewed and improved. Penalties must be strengthened to discourage illegal activities from occurring.

13. Integration of water sharing plans and water resource plans between water sources (regulated and unregulated). For example, the Murray Lower Darling Regulated River Water Sharing Plan must integrate with the Barwon-Darling Unregulated River Water Sharing Plan and associated water resource plans to ensure connectivity with these systems.

14. Mandatory extraction embargos must be written into the Barwon-Darling Unregulated River Water Sharing Plan and/or associated water resource plan to ensure the frequency of flow into the Lower Darling River is increased. The protection of low-flows from the Barwon-Darling to the Menindee Lakes, protection of the Lower Darling River cod population, and continual access to Lower Darling River high security water allocations must be the highest priorities for Barwon-Darling and Lower Darling River connectivity.

15. Enforce the NSW ‘Pools Policy’ (Macro Water Sharing Plans – The Approach for Unregulated Rivers: Access and Trading Rules for Pools) https://www.water.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/547473/wsp_access_trading_rules_pools_unreg_rivers.pdf, especially in the Northern Basin, to protect drought refuge for native fish. Penalties must be increased to discourage over-extraction of critical drought refuge for native fish. Recreational fishers who live along the Macintyre River describe large waterholes being pumped dry by cotton farmers. As a consequence, thousands of native fish have perished. The Border Rivers are described by researchers as containing source populations of golden and silver perch for the Murray-Darling Basin.

16. Ensure longitudinal connectivity with Lake Cawndilla and the Murray River via the Darling Anabranch is achieved whenever Lake Cawndilla is filled to allow migration of juvenile golden and silver perch into the southern basin. Ensure the conditions of the Darling Anabranch Pipeline EIS are met. Remove impediments to fish passage along the Darling Anabranch (e.g. replace 183 Dam with a bridge).
17. The NSW Government and MDBA must fully fund ten-year contracts for an additional 20 NSW water compliance officers and 20 NSW Fisheries compliance officers for the Murray-Darling Basin. The estimated total cost over the ten-year contract period will be $80 million including salaries, on-costs, vehicles and boats (purchase and running costs), training, uniforms and equipment, etc. This will be instrumental in changing a culture of water theft, illegal water diversion and storage works, and illegal fishing in NSW inland rivers.

18. Ensure penalties for water theft, illegal water diversion and storage works, and illegal fishing is appropriate and discourages illegal activities from occurring.

19. Funding for all of the above items is obviously not an issue considering the former Federal Water Minister approved the purchase of the Tandou water ($78 million) and the so-called Warrego River “goanna water” ($17 million), and an $80 million purchase in the Condamine-Balonne. In addition to this expenditure, $800 million is proposed to be spent on the SDL adjustment projects, and the cost of the Broken Hill Pipeline is almost $500 million.

20. Illegal water diversion and storage works must be de-constructed and sites rehabilitated and revegetated at full cost to the landowner/s.

21. In consideration of Item 19, all water purchases approved by the Australian Federal government (especially during Barnaby Joyce’s tenure as Water Minister) must be made public and the NSW Government must support a Federal Royal Commission into the $13 billion Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

22. All proposed works and water purchases must be approved via a public consultation process. Recreational fishing representatives (nominated by their peers) must be included in final approval of proposed works or water purchases by state or federal governments.

23. Any changes made to water sharing plans, especially changes surreptitiously made by NSW Water Ministers after public exhibition, must be reversed.

24. Water sharing plan rules must not be changed for supplementary access or translucency flows in the Murray-Darling Basin, and particularly for the Namoi River and Lachlan River.

25. A ‘No More Dams or Weirs Policy’ must also be agreed to by COAG for the Murray-Darling Basin. Storages in the Murray-Darling Basin have altered the natural flow regime of the river systems. This has had a significant negative effect on our native fisheries and is the primary reason why the major inland rivers in NSW have been determined endangered ecological communities by the NSW Fisheries Scientific Committee (see installation and operation of instream structures and other mechanisms that alter natural flow regimes of rivers and streams). Lack of native fish recruitment in the southern connected basin is principally due to the effects of weirs that have reduced the free-flowing nature of the streams and disconnected historic native floodplain nurseries (such as lakes, creeks and wetlands) from the rivers. Damming the Kiewa, Ovens and King rivers in Victoria will kill the Murray River.

Yours sincerely,

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