

Committee Secretary
Senate Environment and Communications Legislation
Committee
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



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Thursday, 28 February 2019

Submission regarding the Inquiry into the Water Amendment (Purchase Limit Repeal) Bill 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission regarding the Water Amendment (Purchase Limit Repeal) Bill 2019.

We own three properties totalling 500,000 acres on the Lower Darling, approximately 50 km south of the Menindee Lakes. Tolarno Station sits on the Darling River, and all three properties depend on the Darling for livestock and domestic purposes. The properties have a rich history spanning 160 years, and today run merino sheep, cattle and rangeland goats.

The river at Tolarno is currently on red alert for blue-green algae, and will run out of access to water in the coming months. Being south of Menindee Lakes, we are dependent on this system for releases into the Lower Darling. If the Menindee Lakes Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism project proceeds, our business and family will be significantly impacted.

We understand that this committee is considering the Water Amendment (Purchase Limit Repeal) Bill 2019, and that this inquiry has no terms of reference.

The Bill was submitted on 13 February 2019, and in essence is to remove the 1500 gigalitre cap on voluntary buybacks. These buybacks, undertaken by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office represent a key method of water recovery under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The need for further recover of water is two-fold.

We have significant concerns about the Northern Basin Amendment, which was passed by the Parliament in 2018. Since this time, there have been a number of reports which question and science behind this Amendment, including the South Australian Murray Darling Basin Royal Commission. It is in our opinion that this Amendment be reconsidered given the evidence of flawed science. Is such an event that the Amendment is repealed, it would be necessary to recover water in the northern basin.

As previously stated, we have significant concerns regarding the Menindee Lakes Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism project. Our concerns relating to this project have been outlined in previous submissions to a Senate Inquiry and the Productivity Commission. There is strong evidence that the project would have a significant environmental impact, and the project is yet to have an Environmental Impact Statement undertaken. In the likely event the project is unable to proceed, it would be necessary to undertake further water recovery in the southern basin.

Given that further water recovery is likely to be required for the full implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan and to meet the requirements of the Water Act 2007, we make the following statement regarding recovery of water through buybacks.

Direct purchase of water licenses from willing sellers is the most cost-efficient way to recover water. Given that the Murray Darling Basin Plan utilises public funds, the most effective method should be utilised with the provision that there are not significant detrimental socio-economic impacts. Research undertaken by the Murray Darling Basin Authority has shown that the socioeconomic impacts of buybacks are not as significant as previously stated, and that reducing the amount of water available for irrigation has not had a strong negative impact on either agricultural production and associated employment.

If the purchase limit were to remain in place, it would be difficult to recover the remaining water required to meet the sustainable diversion limits set under the Murray Darling Basin Plan. It is critical that in the remaining implementation of the Plan, there be flexibility in the method of water recovery used so that this can be done in the most efficient way and without having a negative environmental impact. This can only be achieved by repealing the purchase limit.

We would be happy to expand further any of our above comments.

Kind regards.

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Tolarno, Peppora and Wyoming Stations

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