

Dear Sir

Please accept the following submission from the Southern Sydney Branch of the National Parks Association of NSW, representing some three hundred members.

The Southern Sydney Branch of the NPA is concerned that there are attempts to weaken the vital reforms being proposed to water entitlements in the Murray-Darling Basin. We have had considerable experience in wetland management. The President of the Branch, Brian Everingham, sat on a joint NPA/WWF/Government taskforce that delivered Ramsar nominations to wetlands in the Macquarie Marshes and the Gwydir, over private tenure, and also worked hard to protect the wetlands along the Murray and Murrumbidgee systems through the campaign to protect the River Red Gums and associated ecosystems.

We can confirm the importance of such wetlands to the health of the whole Murray-Darling Basin and urge the Senate to recognise and accept that:

1. The Water Act 2007 gets the balance right and does not need to be amended. Scientific advice is clear. The river systems need that allocation of water if they are to return to any semblance of health.
2. The Water Act 2007 importantly recognises the need to return extraction to long-term sustainable levels and this must remain the focus. Any weakening of resolve now will be fatal to the reform process and damaging to an entire river system.
3. The Water Act 2007 correctly prioritises the need to reduce water extraction and return water to the environment in order to support both the ecosystems and the communities that depend on them. The balance of water use in the Basin has been heavily weighted towards extraction for irrigation for too long, leading to highly stressed river systems. The Water Act 2007 was introduced in order to address this imbalance and return water to the environment. The Senate and the entire Government must stand firm in the face of industry pressure; for the sake of the environment but also for the long term future of those very industries who are now wanting to protect their allocations. Remember that Healthy rivers equal healthy communities.
4. The Water Act 2007 correctly acknowledges the need to base decisions about sustainable water extraction levels on the best available science. Any call to base decisions on a different 'balance' of social, environmental and environmental considerations will rely on politics and not scientific understanding. Listen to those scientists who have studied the river system and the wetlands within. They are correct in their assessment of the water needs within the basin.

The only alternative to environmentally sustainable extraction levels is unsustainable extraction levels. That would be the death knell for a river system, for the communities along it and for the industries that rely on that river system.

Brian Everingham  
President  
National Parks Association of NSW  
Southern Sydney Branch