



WWF-Australia
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Brisbane QLD 4000

Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Date: 27 February 2019

Re: Inquiry into the Water Amendment (Purchase Limit Repeal) Bill 2019

Dear Sir or Madam,

WWF-Australia welcomes this opportunity to provide the following comments regarding the *Water Amendment (Purchase Limit Repeal) Bill 2019*, which was introduced to the Senate by Senator Louise Pratt (ALP) on 13 February 2019.

If passed, the Bill will repeal the 1,500 GL statutory limit that was introduced to the *Water Act 2007* in 2016 on the volume of surface water the Commonwealth can purchase from willing sellers across the Murray-Darling Basin, which WWF-Australia fully supports for the following reasons:

- Purchasing water entitlements directly from willing sellers is proven to be the most cost effective use of public funds to recover water for the environment
- As it was never part of the original Basin Plan, the introduction of the 1500 GL cap on purchasing water for the environment water has severely constrained governments options to meeting the water recovery targets in the Basin Plan
- As the proposed supply measure projects are unlikely to return sufficient water to the environment in the short term, providing the volume of water needed to improve the health of rivers, wetlands and floodplains can only occur in the short term by purchasing water from willing sellers

- As opportunities to recover water through further on-farm water use efficiencies are virtually exhausted, recovering the remaining 12 GL of water that must be returned to the environment in the Condamine Balonne catchment in the Queensland part of the Basin will be extremely difficult, if not impossible without the ability to purchase water from willing sellers
- The recent mass fish kill in the Darling River has clearly shown that more water needs to be returned to the environment as rapidly as possible in order to improve the ecological condition of the Darling and other rivers across the Basin, which can only be achieved in the short term by increasing the volume of water that can be purchased from willing sellers in affected catchments
- Economic modelling and applied research¹ has shown that reducing the volume of water that can be used for irrigation has not caused any adverse impacts to agricultural production and associated employment across the Basin

Conclusion

As it will greatly increase governments ability to rapidly improve the condition of the Basin's rivers, wetlands and floodplains and to meet the water recovery targets in the Basin Plan, WWF-Australia urges the Environment and Communication Committee members to support the *Water Amendment (Purchase Limit Repeal) Bill 2019* in order to remove the 1500 GL cap on water buybacks across the Murray Darling Basin.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information or clarification regarding any aspect of this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Parratt
Water and Catchment Liaison Officer
WWF-Australia

¹ <https://mdbrcsa.govcms.gov.au/sites/g/files/net3846/f/mdbrc-submission-professor-sarah-wheeler-sa.pdf?v=1527826747>