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Submission to Inquiry into the Water Amendment Bill 2018

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 objects to the proposed Water Amendment Bill 2018 (the Bill) because its purpose appears to be to facilitate a series of legal exceptions, particularly in relation to the recently disallowed Northern Basin Instrument.

The Bill is a further erosion of the intent of the *Water Act 2007* (Water Act).

Our objections are based on the following key issues:

1. The Bill has the purpose of circumventing community consultation provisions in the Water Act. The current version of the Northern Basin Instrument has not been placed on public exhibition for a month, as required.
2. The retrospective validation of the reallocation of water recovery from one valley to another. The provision for water recovered or ‘saved’ in one valley to count toward recovery requirements in another valley has no scientific basis. This approach makes a mockery of the concept of Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) for each water source in the Murray-Darling Basin, as required under the Basin Plan.

3. The inclusion of a retrospective clause deviates significantly from legislative norms.
4. The Bill significantly compromises the independence of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) by interfering with the process of preparing amendments to the Basin Plan.

IRN considers that the Bill will further compromise the purpose of the Water Act to achieve an Environmentally Sustainable Level of Take (ESLT) through the Basin Plan.

This erosion of the intent to prevent ongoing degradation of river and wetland health across the Murray-Darling Basin conflicts with numerous agreements made on water reform in Australia since 1994.

The significant investment of \$13b in the Basin Plan will be a profligate waste of public money if the Bill is adopted.

Yours truly,

Anne Reeves
Secretary